

ERNA STARK



A STORY
OF
CONSCIENCE

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Erna Stark.

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ERNA STARK:

A Story of Conscience.

BY

MARY E. IRELAND.



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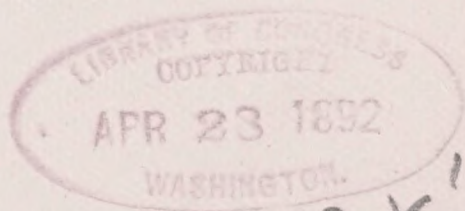
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ERNA STARK:

A STORY OF CONSCIENCE.

Translated from the German of Elise von Fernhain

BY
MARY E. IRELAND.



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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
ON THE STRAND,	5
CHAPTER II.	
THEN AND NOW,	24
CHAPTER III.	
A MORNING WALK,	41
CHAPTER IV.	
NEW IMPRESSIONS,	58
CHAPTER V.	
HELP IN NEED,	71
CHAPTER VI.	
HERR STARK'S PROMISE,	89
CHAPTER VII.	
FATHER AND DAUGHTER,	105

CHAPTER VIII.

THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT,	123
--------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX.

CLINGING TO THE CROSS,	136
----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

PASTOR MULLER'S COUNSEL, ,	150
--------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING,	168
----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONFESSION,	182
---------------------------	-----

ERNA STARK.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE STRAND.

IS it then really spring? Has nature awakened from her winter sleep? Have the swelling buds on tree and shrub at length broken their brown coverings, and clothed themselves in the splendor of their delicate and fragrant robe of green?

In the fields and forest can the answer be given, in the hundred fold ways in which summer proclaims her coming—the voices of myriads of insects, the thousand-voiced concert of forest singers welcoming the long-expected guest.

Different, however, is it upon the shore of the sea. There seeks the eye in vain for tokens of spring. There echoes not the nightingale's song, nor appears the tender green of early verdure. Yet the sea has a beauty of its own, independent of outward accessories, and is ever unchanged by winter snows, or summer

suns. As the Swiss mountaineer longs for the heights when away from them, so does the inhabitant of the coast long for the sea, with its never-ceasing melody ever proclaiming the greatness of its Creator.

It was evening, and the strand of the North Sea was free from pedestrians. Later in the season, the cities would give up their denizens, free to roam, and the cottages near the strand would be filled with guests. In a secluded yet beautiful spot sat, one evening, a gentleman, past middle age, gazing thoughtfully upon the sun as it sank to its ocean bed—an accustomed sight to him, yet one that was ever new. The forest was back of him, and the tops of the taller trees were listlessly swaying in the evening breeze.

This gentleman was Herr Ludwig Stark, a person of wealth and leisure, as his manner and attire betokened. His hair was tinged with gray, and he had not the appearance of one in good health ; yet, while having the sad expression of one not at peace with himself, he was handsome, and of impressive presence.

At length the sun sank from view, leaving a rosy path of light across the placid sea ; and at the same moment the bells of a neighboring church rang out upon the hitherto quiet air.

“It is the eve of the Christian’s Sabbath,” thought he; “how long, how very long it seems, since I have allowed that sound to hold significance and happiness for me. In my happy childhood and youth, the sound of those bells thrilled my heart with solemn joy; now the only feeling is that of unrest, and a longing for something, I know not what, except it be for the innocent faith and hope of that happy time.”

Yes, the bells which ushered in the blessed Lord’s Day recalled those happy times, when he, a merry child, played upon this strand under the eyes of his parents. In the forest back of him he and his young companions had roamed in search of nuts and flowers, and his boat had sped lightly over the blue waters of the sea, which in storm and sunshine was alike dear to him.

Then in later years his clear boyish voice had joined in sweet hymns of praise, in the gray old church; and with what humble and grateful feelings did he receive the rite of baptism in the blue waters of this same beautiful sea, at the hands of Herr Müller, his once loved pastor, while his parents stood by, their eyes dimmed with happy tears.

How vividly came to his mind a boating contest, when he upon this very spot received the laurel

wreath as victor, placed upon his brow by his loved Marie, and afterward received the blessing of her parents and his upon their betrothal! Then as the years sped on, how often had he sat here with his beloved wife, his Marie, watching the gambols of his little Erna as his parents had watched him.

Here had he held sweet communion with her, when her declining strength warned them that she would not long be with him, and when she was taken, it was the sea that gave him comfort in his great bereavement, speaking in its blue-capped waves of God's power and love. It was the sea that gave him hope and longing to live for the sake of little Erna; here he had prayed for submission, and his prayer had been answered; for in those days Ludwig Stark walked with God, and was happy in his love and obedience.

Then as the years passed on, a fair sweet face had won his heart; and he gave Erna a mother, amiable and kind, but totally unfit for training an immortal soul; and he was easily persuaded by her to allow Erna to go to a school in Switzerland to obtain the education which could not without trouble to herself be obtained at home.

Then a daughter was born to them which the young

mother had named Phillis, and whom Erna had never seen. She had been seven years from home, though now her return was daily expected.

The face of Herr Stark, which had been serene, almost peaceful, as he called to mind his youthful days, became overcast when he thought of his wife, and the perplexed, unhappy look which had characterized it returned.

"Fredrica," said he to himself bitterly, "you are the joy and the curse of my life; had I never known you I would still be the happy Christian I once was."

Scarcely were the words uttered, when a charming little girl of six years sprang from a little hillock back of him, and ran toward him with outstretched arms, laughing gleefully.

"Is it mamma you are talking to?" questioned she, looking about her. "Where is she? I do not see her."

"No, Phillis, your mother is at the house; but how did you get here without my seeing you? But a few moments ago you were up the shore, playing in the sand."

"I came here because I saw you."

"But where is Mademoiselle Hortense?" questioned Herr Stark, gazing with tender pride upon his lovely little daughter.

"She has not come back yet. She went to see the gardener about the flowers and ferns mamma wishes for the table to-morrow. She is always glad to get away from me, papa; she sees so many people to talk to, and does not wish me to hear what they say."

"No; children should not always hear the conversation of grown persons. No doubt you hear many things you should not," he continued, with a sigh.

"Yes, that is what Mademoiselle Hortense says," replied the child, eagerly.

"But where have you been, Phillis, during the absence of your governess?"

"I was with that lady who gave me the pretty shells and pebbles."

"Did she give you some to-day?" inquired Herr Stark, more for the purpose of watching the varying expression of the beautiful child than for any interest he had in the conversation.

"No, but she told me some pretty stories. Hark, papa, to the bells ringing; they say, 'Come to church to-morrow; come, come to church to-morrow, come, come.' I am going, papa."

"What do you know of church, Phillis?" inquired her father, in a depressed tone.

"I do not know anything; but I wish to know,

and that is why I am going. The strange lady told me that I would hear beautiful music, and would learn much of the good God, and of some one else who loved little children, but I have forgotten his name."

"Phillis," said her father, "your mother would be vexed if she knew the lady was telling you these things, and perhaps would not let you visit her again."

The words, and particularly the tone of his voice, made an impression upon the child, and she remained silent for some time.

"But I will go to the church to-morrow," said she at length; "the music there is lovely."

"How do you know?"

"I heard it; Mademoiselle Hortense took me there once, but though she wanted me to go in, she said I dare not set my foot over the door sill."

"Hortense was quite right," responded her father, "quite right."

"No, she was not right," said the little girl, in the tone of a spirited and self-willed child; "the strange lady said that everybody should come."

"Even from the lips of my little child am I condemned," thought Herr Stark. "She gives voice to

my thoughts, and confirms the precepts of my early youth."

The father and daughter remained silent for some time, and then Herr Stark, arousing from his abstraction, strove to bring back the smiles to the sweet face of the child.

"There is a beautiful butterfly, Phillis," said he; "don't you wish to catch it?"

"Where?" cried the little one eagerly, as she sprang up and looked about her.

The brilliant insect eluded her grasp, but at that moment Hortense hurried toward her, bearing a fragrant bouquet from the gardener, and Phillis was filled with delight.

They then returned home in the company of Herr Stark, who on the way purchased a doll for Phillis, and all thought of the conversation upon the beach was put out of her mind for the time.

They walked slowly along until they reached the antique dwelling in the main street of the harbor-town. In this homestead had a long line of Herr Stark's ancestors dwelt, and its solid elegance betokened wealth and culture in not only those who now occupied it, but likewise in those who had successively inherited it.

The entrance was massive, and sculptured figures and richly carved wood work ornamented the broad hall and stairway. Comfort and order reigned within and without the luxurious home.

The drawing-room, or the *salon*, as it was named since the coming of Fredrica, was handsomely furnished in modern style, for the young wife had much taste, and resolved that this room should not give token of the antiquity which characterized the others. It was brilliantly lighted, and into it Phillis rushed to show the new doll to her mother.

Herr Stark and Phillis had only expected to find the mother there to receive them. Instead a young and beautiful lady arose from the sofa and hastened forward, while Frau Fredrica arose also, and embraced little Phillis.

In the blond beauty of this lady, it was not difficult to recognize the mother of the child, the resemblance between them being very great, heightened by the toilet of blue and white which both wore. She was indeed lovely in form and feature, and had not yet reached the age of thirty.

The other lady was of style very different, having coal-black eyes, and a brilliant complexion, and was in a dark costume singularly becoming.

For a moment there was a pause of surprise on the part of Herr Stark; then he drew near, and the young lady clasped him about the neck and embraced him heartily.

“Dear, dear father!” exclaimed she, joyfully.

“My darling Erna!” cried he, returning her embrace.

“This is what came of your long promenade,” said Fredrica, smilingly; “for two hours at least she has been here. You had been gone only a few minutes when a telegram came from her, and I sent the carriage to the station to fetch her. She is charmed with all the improvements I have made during her absence.”

“Yes, mamma certainly understands the art of making old things new. She has made of my room a fairy bower. I cannot be sufficiently grateful for her thoughtful kindness,” said Erna, pleasantly.

Herr Stark was in the meantime gazing attentively at his daughter, whom he had not seen since he visited the pension three years before, as she had not been home in all the seven years of school life.

He could not remove his eyes from her; he was endeavoring to trace in her some resemblance to her mother, the wife of his youth, but in vain. Like his

Marie, she was graceful in appearance and winning in manner, but in face and feature she strongly resembled himself.

Had he hoped otherwise, or was he happier not to have this reminder of the past? By his side was his young and beautiful wife, his Fredrica; was not that sufficient happiness for him? Was she doubly dear because he had offered his faith a sacrifice upon the altar of her love?

Phillis, in the meantime, was becoming impatient. She was not accustomed to being overlooked for such a length of time, so she pressed forward, and gazed up at her sister with wide-open eyes of delight at this new interest in her life.

Erna knelt, and clasped the little girl in her arms, and pressed a kiss upon her white forehead.

“You are my little sister,” said she, “my precious little sister, and I hope we will love each other dearly.”

“My sister! Are you the sister Erna?” said Phillis, somewhat bewildered. “Yes, I will love you, for you are beautiful; but not so beautiful as my mamma.”

“You cannot imagine what a mad worshiper of beauty Phillis is,” remarked Fredrica, smilingly. “The doctor,—oh I forgot, you would not know to

whom I alluded,—Dr. Fortescue says the characteristic is more strongly developed in Phillis than in any child he ever saw.”

“I am not surprised at that,” replied Erna, cheerily; “she sees you at all times, and I can remember that for the short time I was at home after you came, I also was a mad worshiper of beauty, as were all about the place.”

“Little flatterer,” said her stepmother, well pleased; “a love for the beautiful is born in people: it cannot be acquired. You both possess by nature the gift of discernment, which appreciates that which is agreeable and discards that which is not. You both inherited this trait from your father.”

“But, Fredrica,” interposed Herr Stark, “your theory fails, in some instances, in regard to Phillis. She has become infatuated with an elderly lady whom she meets on the strand, an invalid, and without the least claim to beauty.”

The moment Herr Stark made the remark he felt that it was an error; the child was listening attentively, and her bright face clouded instantly at this opinion of her friend. She was upon the point of speaking, but thinking better of it, she turned and left the room.

“That is owing to her kind sympathetic nature, my dear Ludwig,” said Fredrica. “The lady like herself is delicate ; were it not for that, she would turn her back upon ugliness in any form. Having been ailing from childhood makes her different from healthy children.”

“And it is that which has also made her capricious and willful,” remarked Herr Stark.

“How can you say that of her, papa ?” said Fredrica, deprecatingly.

“Listen, and you will hear for yourself,” said he.

“I will not go to bed so early ; I will not, and you shall not make me,” came the voice of Phillis from the adjoining room, raised to a fretful cry. “I wish to stay up with sister Erna.”

“Am I not right ?” continued Herr Stark, glancing at the others, an amused yet rather annoyed expression upon his fine face.

It was nothing new for Phillis to refuse to go to bed at that hour ; in fact, it was a foregone conclusion that the contest would come on as regularly as the evening. It was the only one in which Phillis did not come off victorious. The physician had insisted that she should be in bed by eight o’clock, early sleep being absolutely necessary to one so delicate as she.

“What is the matter, Hortense?” said Fredrica, stepping to the door. “You know I always require you to be gentle with Phillis, and to persuade instead of vexing her.”

The young French girl dreaded the hour of the day, because Frau Fredrica always appeared, in manner, to reproach her for the want of immediate acquiescence on the part of Phillis, and when flattering persuasions were without avail, it always ended by Phillis being inveigled to her couch by the promise of sweetmeats or fruit.

One of the stipulations made by Fredrica in selecting a governess and companion for Phillis was that she should possess beauty; not only because she herself loved to have beautiful objects about her, but because she well knew that one who was void of that attribute would have no influence over Phillis.

On this particular evening the little girl refused to go to bed unless Erna accompanied her to her room, and told her a story before she dropped asleep, both of which requests were complied with by Erna, while Hortense, as her share of the contract, supplied two candied cherries.

“You will see, my dear Erna,” said Fredrica, as the young lady returned to the parlor, “that our little

Phillis is easily governed by kindness ; but opposition she cannot and will not brook. She takes a light supper early in the evening, and I have French candied fruit always in reserve to tempt her into complinace, when I see she has a difficulty in overcoming a natural inclination to remain up with us. Other sweetmeats would be injurious to her, but these, being made of healthful materials, are perfectly innocent. It is one of my maxims that children should not be vexed. They are not by nature evil ; of that I am convinced. Therefore if not thwarted on every hand, they will be all that one can desire. I am not one of those who believe in the miserable doctrine of original sin."

"You are all right, Fredrica, until you begin to philosophize ; then you confound precepts in a rather unique way," said Herr Stark, as he in an airy and gallant way kissed the hand of his beautiful wife.

Seeing the subject was not an agreeable one to her father, Erna sought to give it another direction.

"How much that Cupid looks like our dear Phillis!" remarked she, quietly glancing toward a statuette upon a pedestal near.

"The resemblance strikes you, does it?" cried Fredrica, in a tone of delight.

“Was it not modelled from Phillis?”

“No, but I am not surprised that you think so. Dr. Fortescue saw it in an art store in Berlin, and was so struck by the resemblance that he bought it and presented it to Phillis on her last birthday.

“The resemblance is wonderful in all except the eyes. The expression in those of Cupid are childlike, and those of Phillis——”

“Speak out, Erna,” said Frau Fredrica, anxiously, noticing that she appeared at a loss for a word; “the eyes of Phillis sometimes make one fear that we will not have her long with us.”

The beautiful eyes of the mother filled with tears and her voice trembled; and Erna saw that the conversation must again be changed, so she asked some questions in regard to Dr. Fortescue.

“He is really a wonderful man, and a great acquisition to the society here,” replied her stepmother. “His name is Stark, and he is a distant relative of my father and of yours; and we have in some way gotten into the habit of calling him by his first name. He is a native of France, but his parents having been Germans he came here, though he has spent most of his life there.”

“It is seldom, indeed, that one finds a young man

so talented," remarked Herr Stark. "His thorough education has been improved by travel and association with the best society."

"That is the first time I have heard you say so much in his favor," said Frau Fredrica, with a gratified smile.

"Yes, and I must add to what I have said, that I have not a particle of confidence in him."

"It is a pity to prejudice Erna against him, before she has an opportunity of judging for herself," said Fredrica, deprecatingly.

"She will judge for herself," replied Herr Stark, "and my opinion will only be confirmed."

"I am getting quite curious to see him," smiled Erna; "a man with such a contradictory nature must surely be an enigma to most people."

"Your curiosity can not be gratified for a time," replied Frau Fredrica, "for Dr. Fortescue is traveling in Italy. So popular is he here, and so indispensable in all merry-makings, that festivals of all kinds are being postponed until he returns; so you came home at a rather dull time."

At that moment the parents were notified that supper was served, and they went to the dining room where Erna was almost dazzled with the brilliancy of

the appointments of the board, and the rare quality of the viands.

The appearance of all was rich in the extreme ; and Erna could see the trace of her stepmother's exquisite taste in all the details of the elegant room.

Erna had before given a cordial greeting to all the servants who had presented themselves, some of them having been in her grandfather's service, and who now waited upon her with silent delight.

She had, very soon after her arrival, inquired for old Anna, who lived in a room in the back building of the dwelling, and had been her nurse, and her father's before her ; but an unmistakable shadow which her question called to the fair face of her stepmother caused her to refrain from further inquiry, resolving to wait for the developments of time.

Thus the meal progressed in cheerful chat,—incidents in the childhood of Erna forming the chief theme ; the freaks of the aged house-dog created merriment, and the other household pets came in for their share of comment. Even the trees which shaded the garden had a place in Erna's memory, and she was glad to hear that they had never been disturbed, but flourished in their old-time beauty.

As soon as supper was finished, Erna retired to her room, somewhat wearied from her journey, and longing to be alone that she might think over the incidents of the day, to which she had looked forward for many years.

CHAPTER II.

THEN AND NOW.

AFTER long years in a Swiss school, it was a great delight to Erna to be at her home, which looked very elegant and luxurious after the severe simplicity of the pension. She cast a satisfied glance about the beautiful room, which her stepmother had taken great delight in rendering attractive, yet a sad smile crossed her lips as old memories pressed upon her. She had heard much of the amiability of her father's second wife, yet the reception accorded her surpassed her expectations.

When she left home, she was too young to realize the comforts and luxuries she was leaving, having been accustomed to them all her life; and her school-days in the Geneva pension had many attractions and pleasures.

During the last two years she had not been under the strict rules which were necessary for less advanced pupils. So the time was indeed enjoyed; the pleasures of anticipation being no small part of the enjoyment.

Fredrica's wishes had been carried out—that Erna should remain at school until old enough to go into society, and be competent to take care of herself; for she dreaded responsibility. This request was due to the knowledge of Erna, which Fredrica had obtained from acquaintances of the family. She had gathered that Erna was a very earnest and thoughtful girl for one of her years, would have opinions of her own, and, as daughter of the house, would endeavor to maintain them. Any objections to her opinions, Fredrica reasoned, would lead to dissension; and the relatives and servants would take the part of Erna, and discomfort would reign where Fredrica wished all to be serene.

“You see, dear Ludwig,” said she, a few days after the marriage, “I do not wish our early married life disturbed by governesses. We live in such beautiful peace and harmony, that it is a pity to call in an element that would mar it; yet it would be impossible to do without a governess for Erna if she remains at home. So I think it would be far better to send her to a good school.

“It she were here, every arrangement I would make, every suggestion I would offer, would awaken the dissatisfaction of the old servants; they would

talk in the presence of the child, and as a result would influence her against me. I have always been accustomed to doing as suited me, and am quite willing to allow Erna her rights when she is old enough to know what her rights are. We cannot do without servants, but we can do without a governess. Let Erna go to the excellent pension in Geneva until old enough to enter society, then bring her home, and I promise you we will live together in perfect harmony and contentment."

To part with his little daughter was a great trial to Herr Stark, but he could see nothing better than to agree with the plan of Fredrica, and he moreover knew that the course of instruction in the pension could not be surpassed. Erna therefore returned to her father's house, not only well instructed in the solid branches, but well trained in music and painting and other accomplishments.

The religious training in the pension was, however, such as Fredrica had received, and could only be classed under the head of materialism.

But what satisfied the reason of Fredrica could not satisfy Erna; she longed for something more than this world could offer—a firmer foundation upon which to rest. She treasured the recollection of her own

pious mother, with whom she had knelt at the bedside, and prayed for the blessing of the Heavenly Father and his protection during the night. But it was a mere recollection, so far back in the past that it was almost like a dream. In her heart was a secret altar to "the unknown God," and Erna had not been placed under influences that would lift the veil and enable her to see him in all his beauty.

The first evening of her return, however, was given up to the delight of being at home, and her heart was filled with gratitude to the beautiful woman who had made her so welcome. Was she really back in this luxurious home? Was she to be among the fortunate ones of earth to whom all things contributed their pleasures? Were her parents as happy as she hoped they were? To outward appearances they were so, yet her heart was stirred with the thought that her father was more changed than his years warranted? Was it only in her imagination, or did there really rest upon his countenance a look of depression, as though his heart were heavy with some secret sorrow?

She leaned back in the comfortable chair by the window, and tried to think or imagine the cause of her sadness.

Her stepmother had been compared to the sun, in

giving brightness to the lives of every one about her. Erna thought of all she had heard concerning her amiability, her cheerfulness, her kind nature. Her father had appeared to appreciate his wife's beauty and light-heartedness more than any one; how then could it be that his melancholy could in any way be attributed to her?

Erna knew very little of her stepmother except that she was the only daughter of a wealthy merchant in one of the inland towns of Germany; that her mother had died when she was an infant and that an aunt, incompetent to manage, took charge of his home.

If the large retinue of servants were allowed to do as they chose, how much more freedom was allowed the daughter of the house? In time the father remained later and later in his counting room, and when he had guests, preferred taking them to a hotel, instead of his ill-ordered dwelling.

So it was that Fredrica knew but little of her father. He was a sad, morose man, and although she knew that he provided her with all the comforts by which she was surrounded, she feared him more than she loved him, and kept as much as possible out of his society. This state of affairs changed but

slightly as she grew older, although her father had great pride in his beautiful daughter.

Fredrica had a naturally fine mind, but her education would have been extremely meagre had it not been for a cousin of her father, who had been a noted professor in a college, and, having come to the city, took great interest in the beautiful girl. She learned rapidly, and her vanity was fostered by the sincere praises of her teacher.

Many noble attributes, however, remained undeveloped by this course of education: her intellect was cultivated at the expense of her heart.

The professor had made it a subject for boasting that he possessed no religion. He considered it an evidence of strength of character to be superior to what he termed such weakness—a pure and simple faith in the risen Saviour being something which he considered only for the uncultured and credulous; and he imbued Fredrica with his doctrines.

Her mother had been an intelligent and cultured Christian lady, and had looked forward to the time when her daughter would be led to the foot of the cross to be saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit; but now when the time had come when she might be converted and under-

standingly receive baptism the emblem of that regeneration, her head was filled with the world and its vanities to the exclusion of that which was above price. Nothing was sown in her fertile mind to bring forth a harvest of faith and good works. Fredrica, like the brilliant butterfly, lived only for the present.

Having no one but the inefficient aunt to guide her, she always had her own way ; therefore as the time came when she considered her school-days over, she refused to study any longer, and was determined to enter society, in which she was immediately the admired of all admirers.

With wealth, beauty, accomplishments and amiability, she had, as may be supposed, many suitors ; but whom among them all would she consider worthy, and for whom would she give up her independence?

She enjoyed this congenial life but a very short time, for there came a great change. The apparently solid house of Stark & Co. failed—became completely bankrupt ; her father survived the trouble but a few short months, and Fredrica was thrown upon the cold charity of the world.

During the first weeks of her bereavement, she scarcely knew which way to turn. She had no desire

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to become a governess, and there was nothing else she could do ; so she resolved to mend her fortunes by marrying a wealthy man, this hope keeping her supported during the dark days following her father's death.

She found, as thousands had done before her and thousands will do after her, that the friends who gathered about her in the time of prosperity, fled when likely to be called upon for assistance in her time of dependence. Where had her worshipers flown? Where the friends who were guests in her once luxurious home? Where those whom her father had benefited in the days of his prosperity? Gone like the chaff before the wind.

The professor would have remained a friend to her, but he had gone on a long journey to the East, in the furtherance of science, and knew nothing of her change of circumstances.

Fredrica stood alone by the ruins of her fallen fortunes, and needed all the philosophy she could summon to believe there was a silver lining to the dark cloud which hovered over her.

The first gleam of light which came to her was an invitation from the sister of her father, who had married a jeweller, and lived in the little harbor-town upon the shore of the North Sea. This aunt

wrote a kind and cordial invitation to the orphan girl to come to them, offering to make up to her the great loss she had sustained, so far as it was in her power.

This opportunity was not at all what Fredrica would have wished had she been favored with a choice ; but there was no alternative, and making her arrangements as speedily as possible she journeyed north, and was received with open arms by her aunt.

The home so kindly offered struck Fredrica at first sight with dismay. She had never in her prosperous life come in contact with anything so plain, as the little *bürgerlich* dwelling. The narrow surroundings and petty economies came as a revelation to her, and she could not imagine that people could live and be happy under such circumstances.

But Fredrica was not the only one who felt the discomfort and inconvenience of the arrangement. For the strange guest in the house to be as one of the family, yet unaccustomed to their manner of living, rendered the little jeweller and his wife awkward and constrained ; they were put out of the way of their easy and contented mode of life.

In her uncle's house, Fredrica found a species of religion ; but one which was almost as far from the life-giving principle of true and growing grace, as was

the non-belief to which she had been trained by the professor. It was all form and ceremony ; never a word for Christ was spoken to the young girl under their roof, never a prayer that she might be guided in the straight and narrow way. All the outward observances of their church were attended to, but in the home circle the words of faith in a higher power, the comforting trust in a risen Saviour were never uttered ; and the niece knew no more of the plan of salvation when she left them than when she came, having always declined attending church, which they did not insist upon, well satisfied for that length of time to be alone with each other. While residing under this roof she became acquainted with Herr Ludwig Stark, a distant relative of her father and her aunt ; and Fredrica was not long in seeing that he was captivated by her beauty, which was enhanced by the deep mourning she wore for her father. Herr Stark had the remembrance of his short and happy married life always in mind, and lived for his little daughter Erna. He had been accustomed to pass his evenings in the home of the jeweller, and found a great attraction there in the society of Fredrica. He pitied her lonely, orphaned life, and asked her to become his wife and mistress of his home.

Although Fredrica was romantic as most girls of her age, she was also extremely practical; and though she would have preferred a husband nearer her own age, she considered that his great wealth made up for that, an unselfish and disinterested love being to her impossible. Her life at her uncle's was so dull and distasteful that she was willing to seize the first opportunity to leave it; and she had the art of making herself so agreeable when she had an object in view that it could easily have been mistaken for real affection. She did not love her suitor as a woman should love the one whose happiness is in her hands, but she knew that he could surround her with every comfort and luxury, and resolved to make him happy by her amiability, and her respectful demeanor toward him.

She admired his freedom from affectation, and, though so wealthy, his power of appearing at ease in the contracted rooms of her uncle's dwelling, and his interest in the details of the meagre life of the old people, which she knew must seem mean and narrow to him.

Herr Stark had inherited from his godly parents a belief in the saving power of the gospel, but he had read irreligious books and associated with those who had made science take the place of humble faith; and

while not entirely an unbeliever, had not made Christ a personal Saviour, nor looked to him for strength to fight the battle of life and to endure its trials.

When he married Fredrica he was just at a stage in his spiritual experience when he could be biased either way, and in the choice of a companion for life the influence was against religion.

Fredrica became his wife and a new element came into the ancestral home of Herr Stark, and he could not but be reminded of the words of Heine—"Beautiful women without religion are like flowers without perfume. They resemble cold, sober tulips, which look upon us from their china vases, as though they were of porcelain; and if they could speak, they would explain to us how naturally they grow from a bulb; and how so far as perfume is concerned, a rational flower has no need of it whatever."

Erna, in the seclusion of her own pretty room, thought of the changes in the ancestral home, so changed within and without that one could scarcely recognize it as the same she had left seven years before. She gave due credit to her stepmother's unerring taste, yet could not restrain a feeling of longing for her old home as she had known it in childhood.

It was not the home-coming of which she had

thought and dreamed for years ; it did not seem like a loved daughter's return to the haunts of a happy childhood ; it was more like that of a guest invited to be at home in splendor to which she had never been accustomed, and in an atmosphere in which she felt strange and out of place. Erna felt more homesick than she had ever felt in the pension, and could have wept bitter tears at the change of the old place and in her father.

There was nothing of which she could complain in the reception given her ; she was as cordially welcomed as daughter of the house as she could have wished. She saw that her young stepmother was a light-hearted creature, who looked upon life as a long holiday, and Erna felt that it was not her place to say or do aught to make it otherwise to her. Her wish had always been to be happy as possible, and to do all in her power to make others so, and she resolved to adhere to that course of action. She would fill her appointed place in the household to the satisfaction of all, so far as it lay in her power ; and from present prospects it did not appear to be a difficult thing to do.

Erna paused in her reflections and glanced around the beautiful room which had always been hers.

What a bower of beauty her stepmother had made it ! What exquisite taste she had evinced in all its appointments ! She saw many of her old favorites, but in such different circumstances that she at first scarcely recognized them. There was the portrait of her loved mother which had always hung in the large parlor below, now over the sofa in her room, its massive antique frame draped with an elegant embroidered scarf, which, while rich and artistic, robbed the dear face of its familiar look. In an elegant bookcase, with plate glass doors, were the loved books of her childhood, and upon the little old-time mahogany table upon which she and her mother had partaken of many little feasts was spread a gayly silver-fringed cover.

Was her stepmother a sorceress that she could so accurately divine Erna's tastes in art ? Statuettes which she had admired smiled at her in unexpected niches in the large apartment ; copies of rare paintings looked down upon her from unfamiliar walls, and the music upon the open cabinet piano was that which she had known and loved in the Swiss pension.

"I ought to be happy here, and I will be," thought she, her tour of her apartment being ended and her place by the window resumed.

She attributed it all to kindness that Fredrica had made her room so beautiful, and was particularly grateful that her mother's picture had been placed where she could see it at all times; the sweet face looking down in benediction upon her, comforting her more than anything besides upon the broad earth could have done.

Notwithstanding her joy in having it, she grieved for the wreath of faded flowers which she and her father had gathered and placed upon it the evening before she left for Switzerland, but would not dampen her stepmother's pleasure by alluding to it, and tried to forget that it was ever there.

She called to mind old Anna, who had been her comfort and support when her mother was taken, who had told her that the dear Saviour smiled upon her when she was good and was grieved when she was naughty and disobedient; and that perhaps her mother who watched over her was also grieved when she was not making the effort to do right.

With all these reflections that thronged her mind, the thought of her father's sad and preoccupied manner recurred again and again, and she wondered who could be the one to tell her the cause—"Old Anna; her childhood's nurse, and that of her father

before her?" Erna glanced at her watch, yes, it was too late to seek the old woman in her little home back of the main building. She was most likely in bed, and a visit from Erna at that hour would disturb her, and perhaps cause a sleepless night. But in the morning she would visit her and hoped—oh so earnestly—that she would find no changes there.

She longed to see the high post bedstead with its hangings of checked blue and white homespun linen, the soft bed with its white drapery, the old high back arm chair covered with the same blue and white as the curtains, the old claw-foot table inlaid with Dutch tiles, representing the history of Joseph and his brethren, which Anna had often explained to her. She wished to see the delf ware, and the cuckoo-clock, in its wonted place upon the mantel shelf, where she in childhood had watched the cuckoo fly out and nod to her while proclaiming in silvery tones the hour; yes, she hoped to see it all in the morning, and could scarcely endure the delay. She knew that with the dear old Anna in her little home, she would feel that her childhood had not all been a vanished dream.

Erna tapped a bell by her side and her maid came to help prepare her for rest, then retired to her own cabinet adjoining.

No prayer arose from Erna upon this, the evening of her return to her father's house after seven years of absence ; but in the home of old Anna, prayers for the daughters of the house and for all under its roof were ascending from a faithful heart, and God's blessing particularly craved for her who was motherless, and had returned that day to the home of her childhood.

Anna had not gone to rest as Erna supposed ; instead, her lamp burned dimly upon the little claw-footed table, and beside it was the old Bible in which she had been reading, while beside the blue covered chair knelt Anna.

It was not this evening alone that she had prayed for her beloved Erna, but every evening since her birth had her prayers been offered for the dear foster child, in obedience to the request of the fair young mother, who with her last breath had prayed : “ Dear Saviour, abandon not my child, watch over her, protect her, be with her through joy and sorrow ; let her be thine, and thine only for time and for eternity.”

CHAPTER III.

A MORNING WALK.

THE next morning came a knock upon Anna's door, and to the invitation to come in appeared Erna, robed in a neat morning toilette.

Anna was just about to partake of her breakfast and her coffee in a bright little pot, two little dishes of brown and white bread and a small pot of butter were upon the board—the very table which had been Erna's delight in childhood.

Anna had heard from the servants of the arrival of the young Fräulein, but could not realize that this elegant, stately young lady was the little girl from whom she had parted so sorrowfully seven years before. She could not believe that it was her Erna, her dear little Erna, who greeted her so lovingly ; so she courtesied in embarrassment, with a somewhat bewildered look, while Erna on her part thought that Anna was perhaps piqued that she had not visited her the evening before, instead of putting it off until morning. At that moment the door of the clock

flew open, and the cuckoo hopped out and proclaimed hour of eight, to the great delight of Erna, who in the speedy glance she had cast about the room found nothing unchanged, except Anna herself, who was somewhat more bent and wrinkled.

“Anna, dear Anna, are you not glad to see me? Do you forget the old times when you grieved if I was from you but a single day, and how you kissed and petted me when I returned?”

So chattered Erna that Anna might have time to recover herself, which she did after a time, although she could not summon courage to address the elegant young lady as “thou,” the familiar term of endearment in childhood.

“No, gracious lady,” said she at length, “I have not forgotten my Erna, but I do not see her in this foreign princess who comes into my poor little room. How can I believe it is my little one! And yet it must be Erna, for her mother was an angel of beauty and goodness, and her father is yet a very handsome man. Come, my little heart, and take my kiss of welcome, if you will receive it from an old nurse. I cannot take you in my old arms as I once did, that time is forever past, but my heart rejoices to see you.”

Erna bowed her stately head to receive the kiss,

and in return pressed one upon the wrinkled cheek of Anna.

“May God bless your home-coming my precious one, and may it prove a blessing to this house,” said the old nurse with deep emotion.

Erna sank into the blue-and-white covered arm chair, and let her eyes wander about the room which seemed much smaller than when she was a child but was otherwise unchanged.

Her attention was attracted to the Sabbath repose and serenity of the little place, and she noticed that Anna’s best clothing and bonnet lay upon the bed, recalling to her mind that it was Sunday morning, which, in the excitement of her home-coming, had been almost overlooked.

Erna was somewhat confused that she had so nearly forgotten it; remembering how she had rejoiced in her childhood’s days, when she had gone to the church services with her dear parents, and with Anna. But no inducement would have been sufficient to cause her to commence a conversation upon the subject, knowing the reverence with which the innocent and deeply spiritually minded woman observed the day.

“That coffee cup with the green wreath around it

is the one I gave you when we parted. Is it not Anna?"

"Certainly it is, dear one, and I hope to drink out of it as long as the good Master allows me to live. Perhaps you will have a cup of coffee with me. Herr Stark and the gracious lady will not take breakfast for at least an hour. You used to like my coffee, and I have made more than usual this morning, for my grandson, Adolph, will come to go with me to church, and he enjoys a cup of grandmother's coffee."

Erna signified her willingness, and Anna went to the corner cupboard, and took out an old-time delft cup and saucer which had always been the admiration of Erna, and after carefully rinsing them, poured out a cup of coffee for each, from the old-fashioned little coffee pot. Together they enjoyed the good bread and fresh butter, very welcome to the young lady who, owing to her morning walk, had really an excellent appetite.

Before calling upon Anna, she had taken a survey of the grounds; had strolled through the lawn and garden down to the sea, everywhere seeing traces of Fredrica's hand. The lawn was gay with roses and other choice flowers, and statuettes met her at every turn. The garden was laid out in geometrical figures

and bordered with box, and graveled walks led through it to the sea.

Erna spoke of her walk and of the change which met her on every side.

“Yes,” replied old Anna, with a sigh, “nothing is as it once was.”

“Only yourself, dear good Anna,” replied the young girl, affectionately; “tell me all about your grandchildren, and especially Adolph who was so studious.”

“Yes, and studious he remained, and is now a school teacher. Oh, he is such a good boy, the pride of my old age; pious he is, like his blessed father.”

“And Mina—said Erna, “I remember she always said she would be my little maid, and I was so surprised when she came in to see me to find a great tall girl. I could not at first believe it was the little Mina I had once known.”

“Oh, yes, she has been several years at service at Pastor Müller’s. She has plenty of work there, but work is good for young people like her; it keeps them out of mischief. Idleness is the mother of evil.”

There was a touch of embarrassment in Anna’s tone when she said this which did not escape the notice of Erna, but she made no comment.

“And August ; where is he ?” she continued.

“He is with a wood-carver, a godly man who is instructing him in the trade.”

“Then you are never lonely here,” commented the young girl.

“No, when my son Fritz died, and his wife in a little while after, I wondered how in the world I should ever be able to take care of the poor little ones they had left behind, with no one to see to them except a helpless old woman. I wondered how I could raise them, and do justice to the poor orphans. But God was good ; it never proved a burden to me too heavy to be borne. They grew up before I was aware of it, and were always a comfort and a help. My heart has grown still and resigned when I think of my son, and my daughter-in-law and their little Ida, knowing that they are safe in heaven with the Lord, above and beyond all the sorrows and trials of earth. They served their God faithfully while here, and he does not forget his children, but leads them into green pastures and beside the still waters.”

Erna said nothing ; she could not enter into the feelings of the old nurse. She considered that Anna's faith belonged to a past day and generation, and was not at all adapted to the nineteenth century, nor to the

cultivated intellects among whom she had place. At the same time she could but acknowledge that it was a beautiful belief. She looked at the happy countenance of old Anna, rejoicing in the certainty of meeting her loved ones again, and knowing in whom she trusted.

“About yourself, Anna, how has it been with you in all this time? Have you been well in body and mind, as you are at the present time?”

“There are days which suit me not ; for it is not a light thing to feel one’s strength leaving, and to see others who are younger, whom we love, suffer the afflictions of life. We lose our interest in the few pleasures left us upon earth, and turn our minds to the home above. God has been gracious to me ; I live with as few cares as most people, and have joy in my dear grandchildren.”

“Yes, they must be a great pleasure to you, being so good and faithful.”

“My work on earth is done, and I will go willingly to my Father’s house, when he calls me. And his will be done,” continued she, as though speaking to herself.

“But,” said Erna, who continued the conversation in spite of her distaste for the subject, “if all is going

on so well upon earth, why are you so willing to leave it?"

"Because it will be much better for me above. I shall see my Saviour, and shall be with my husband and children, and all who have gone before."

"How can you be so sure of that?"

"How can I be so sure of it?" questioned the old nurse, gazing with surprise into the face of the young girl: "because it stands written there." And she nodded to the Bible lying on the table."

"Do you really believe all that is in that book?"

"If I did not believe all, I could believe nothing; and would be so miserable that I would wish I had never been born."

"Yes, when a child I also loved all the beautiful stories that you told me out of it. Yes, I loved to listen to them."

Erna had not understood that her words would be taken so literally, and was unprepared for the look of distress upon the pale face of her old nurse.

"And now Erna,—and now how stands it with you?"

Erna was silent,—she could not repay the devotion of her faithful old friend with words that would stab like a knife. But Anna did not wait long for a reply.

“I hoped, oh, how I hoped that you who were so far away from the false teaching which has come into this house, might have a faith so firmly established ere you came under its influence, that nothing could shake it. That was my comfort when I reflected upon these things. It is anguish enough to know that your father has forgotten the God which his fathers served; and now that you should, you poor misguided child.” And bowing her head Anna wept bitterly.

“Anna, dear Anna, don’t distress yourself about me,” said the young girl, passing her soft white hand tenderly on the cheek of the old nurse. When I am as old as you, and get weary of life, no doubt I will return to the faith of my childhood; but now I am young and have no time for such things. Please take the coffee pot and other things from the table that I may see the pictures of Joseph and his brethren which, sleeping or waking, have so often come to my mind when far away.”

Anna obeyed, a prayer ascending to her Father for the young girl whom she so loved.

“Oh, how different, how distorted these figures look which once were so beautiful to me!” said Erna, gazing upon them. “The faces of the Egyptians remind

me of gnomes at fountains, and the one who is bargaining for Joseph has a gun in his hand ; just think, a gun, four thousand years ago." And tears of mirth filled the beautiful dark eyes of the young girl.

"It was a better time in your life, my child, when you wept for the misfortunes of poor Joseph, represented upon these tiles, than now when you are laughing at them," said Anna, with tears of real distress causing her voice to tremble.

"Perhaps you are right," said the young girl, trying to recover herself. "You must really excuse me, dear Anna, for I know how you reverence the tiles ; but I have seen so many fine paintings since I left here, that you cannot imagine how grotesque these appear to me."

The old nurse said nothing, but that she was pained Erna could not fail to see.

"But I am keeping you from church, or at least from getting ready for it. I see your dress on the bed in readiness ; certainly, papa and mamma are ready for breakfast by this time."

"Are you not going to church ?" said Anna, earnestly.

"I ?" replied the young girl, in embarrassment. "You certainly cannot expect me to go to-day."

“And why not?” questioned the old nurse; “certainly you will spend an hour or two in God’s house the first day of your home-coming, and thank him for his great mercy and loving-kindness in allowing you to return after so long an absence, sound in body and mind.”

“Now, Anna, I think it real cruel in you to wish me to bury myself in a mouldy old church this beautiful spring day, to listen to a dry tedious sermon. Besides, I have so much to do! You don’t know how much, Anna,”—noticing the sad face of the old woman. “I have to unpack all my trunks, and see that everything is put in its place. My room is so beautiful that I wish to dispose of all I brought to the best advantage, and keep it looking as neat as it is now. Mamma was very kind to do so much to give me pleasure, and it is as little as I can do to show that I appreciate it by not running away from it the very first day. I expect to be very happy in my beautiful room.”

“Happy!” echoed old Anna, shaking her head sadly; “ask your father if he is happy with his beautiful home.”

This was the very turn which Erna was wishing the conversation to take, for she longed to know

Anna's opinion without letting her suspect that she felt any doubt of his happiness.

"Why should he not be happy, Anna; has he not everything to make him so?"

"Yes; he is rich, has a beautiful wife, a loving little daughter, and now his loved elder daughter is with him after a long separation. He has a home with every comfort, and faithful servants; is loved and esteemed by his friends and neighbors, yet does he appear happy, Erna? Is it possible to be happy without God? And the young frau: is she happy? She has made an idol of her little daughter; she worships her, and the thought of her failing health robs the mother of sleep."

"Is Phillis not well?" questioned Erna, somewhat anxiously; "are they really worried about her health?"

"The child is very delicate, that is certain; but those who trust in God are willing to put their dear ones in his care, knowing that he will watch over them far more faithfully than the most loving parents can do. Of this dear and pitying God the poor young frau knows nothing. She feels that she is helpless to restore the little one to health. This worries her, and she seeks forgetfulness in amusements of every kind;

but in dance and play the spectre is ever at her side, overshadowing all her joy."

"Oh, Anna, you surely see everything with the eyes of age and in the darkest colors; nothing seems to you as it does to one who is young and happy. They have not ceased to think of God and take pleasure in the Bible; but they have become more mature and intellectual, and do not accept it all, as one does in childhood."

"Who showed them what was true and what was false? Who has a right to judge?"

"All scientific people."

"That would be sad for us who are not learned. No, dear Erna, my dear, dear child, your wisdom here is not a saving wisdom. God has said in his blessed word: 'Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.'"

"Well, we will not discuss this question, dear Anna; I do not wish to rob you of your faith, since you take so much comfort in it."

"You could not do it. On the shelf there lies a book which my honored pastor gave me. My eyes are dim, and I cannot read it very well, but I comforted myself with the thought that you—my dear foster child—my loved Erna, would soon be at home,

and would read it to me. It is the true history of martyrs, who endured the most terrible tortures and death rather than give up their faith in the God in whom they believed. They remained true to him, and are now reaping the reward in his kingdom above. It is a terrible history, but one it would be well for you to know, that you may see what men have done in defense of the faith which you esteem so lightly. Our faith is worth nothing if we would not suffer death rather than part with it."

"Oh, well, Anna, I will say no more to vex you; and maybe some time I may be as good as you," continued she, lightly, as she bade her old nurse good-bye and entered the breakfast room just as her parents entered by another door.

"Where have you been so early, dear Erna?" questioned her stepmother.

"All over the beautiful lawn and garden, admiring the exquisite taste you have displayed in arranging them. You have been very busy in the seven years of my absence, mother mine."

Fredrica was pleased with the honest praise of her work, and Herr Stark looked with approving glance at his daughter, whose blooming face gave token of perfect health.

Erna noticed that her father looked even more faded in the clear light which streamed into the breakfast room than by lamplight the evening before. She wondered if, after all, old Anna was right; and if a childlike faith in God the Father, and in his written word, were conducive to happiness in this world as well as in the next; and whether the loss of it was the cause of his gloom. She realized that Anna was happier than he, let the cause be what it might.

The young girl considered these things in her mind while listening to the conversation between Herr Stark and Fredrica over the events of the day, noticing that her stepmother glanced frequently toward the door as though expecting some one.

She soon discovered the cause, for Phillis entered accompanied by Hortense.

"Did my little darling sleep well, Hortense?" questioned the mother, eagerly.

"No, ma'am; she seemed restless and feverish all the early part of the night, but rested better toward morning."

"I have no doubt my coming made a little excitement for her and put her out of her usual way," said Erna, as the words of old Anna returned to her mind at sight of the pale cheeks and hollow eyes of

the little girl whom Hortense was waiting upon at table.

"I am so eager for the Baths to open," said Fredrica; "the doctor gives me every assurance that bathing will be of great benefit to Phillis."

"Mamma, the strange lady that gave me the beautiful shells is waiting for the Baths just like me. I wish I could bathe with her; she says she loves to have little girls with her."

"No doubt you can, my dear one, and it speaks well for your affectionate little heart that you are willing to be with one who is an invalid," said her mother.

"The lady has indeed a very pleasing manner," remarked Herr Stark; "although she is delicate, she is willing to amuse little ones. I judge by her dress and manner of living that she is in very moderate circumstances, and an entire stranger here."

"I wish you had learned her name," said Fredrica, the interest which the stranger took in Phillis being sufficient passport to her favor.

"Her name is Frau Ehlert," said Hortense, respectfully; "she has come to breathe the sea air, and will remain for the Baths. She is very poor, I think, and lodges in one of the little houses near the strand."

“Poor, sick, and a stranger: three sad things for one person to endure,” said Fredrica, reflectingly. “Suppose we go to see her, Phillis; perhaps we may be of help to her in some way.”

“Oh, yes, mamma; do let us go! She is so kind and tells me such beautiful stories that the time flies quickly when I am with her. Do, do let us go, mamma.”

The father saw the animated face of his child, and was upon the point of telling Fredrica the nature of the stories which the lady told Phillis, well knowing that if she knew she would not go near her; but a glance at the pleading face of his child restrained him, and he remained silent.

Phillis seldom came in contact with strangers, owing to the care with which she had always been guarded, and Fredrica looked upon the intimacy as merely an interest in the dull life of her child, and was grateful for the kindness which prompted it.

“Yes, we will go, little one,” said she, kindly, not noticing the glances between Herr Stark and Phillis; and the little girl went to him, and laying her hand upon his arm, said, “Thank you, dear papa; you are so good!”

CHAPTER IV.

NEW IMPRESSIONS.

BEFORE a large mirror in Fredrica's boudoir, stood Erna one evening viewing her tall, majestic figure, and almost wondering to herself whether that brilliant creature reflected there could be the schoolgirl so recently in the Geneva pension. A rich white satin robe fell in heavy folds to her feet, and a long train of the same material added, apparently, to her height. The classic beauty of her face was enhanced by a coronet of diamonds, and the same jewels glittered in a necklace about her throat, and in bracelets upon her beautifully moulded arms.

This room had been selected as a reception room for guests who were to take part in a set of tableaux, which Frau Fredrica had arranged in honer of Erna's return to her father's house. Apollo, Terpsichore, and many other characters of heathen mythology were to figure that evening, as well as some of modern times ; the pauses to be filled in by music of Mozart, Wagner and Beethoven, as none better understood the art of giving guests a delightful evening than Fredrica.



Erna Stark.

In the fortnight since Erna's return many calls had been received. The family had a large circle of acquaintances and was very popular; their home was charming and Fredrica very hospitable. Erna laughingly compared the succession of visits to the leaves of a photograph album, turned over.

She had looked eagerly forward to her first party, and was buoyant over her entrance into the society of which her beautiful young stepmother was the acknowledged leader.

The evenings were so short, it was arranged that the guests should assemble before sunset. The large drawing room shutters were closed, the heavy curtains excluding every ray of the sun, and the room was brilliantly lighted, setting off the toilets to the greatest advantage. But in the boudoir of Fredrica the afternoon sun entered freely through the rose-colored curtains, and Erna thought she had never imagined a more beautiful room.

After having satisfied herself that her costume was perfect in every detail, she took a nearer view of all the little elegancies with which her stepmother had surrounded herself, then took a book from the table and was soon deeply interested in its pages.

It was "Torquato Tasso," and from it was to be

taken one of the most beautiful tableaux of the evening, one in which she was to have part. With deep interest she perused the page, and so absorbed did she become that the door opened without attracting her attention, and a gentleman, young and handsome, dressed in costume and with a wreath of laurel upon his head, stood beside her. Erna knew at a glance that he was the Tasso for the evening.

“An introduction is scarcely necessary,” said Erna, extending her hand in welcome. “You are Herr Doctor Fortescue, and of course, you know by my costume that I am the Princess Leonore.”

“Fräulein Erna Stark,” said he, pressing the small white hand, “allow me to welcome you home, though late in my congratulations.”

“Thank you ; I am glad to be at home ; the reality far exceeds my expectations. My dear mother cannot do enough to make me happy, and I am indeed grateful to her.”

Erna could see the admiration with which the doctor regarded her. The costume suited her well. She had looked forward to this moment with joyful anticipations, and the result had been all she had hoped for.

A pause ensued, which Erna hastened to shorten,

lest it should become embarrassing: "Mamma and I were very sorry we were out when you called. We had heard of your arrival, and made our walk to the beach much shorter than we would have done had we not thought you would perhaps call."

"My visit was more especially to you, gracious Fräulein; I wished to make your acquaintance before we met in company."

"Then I am doubly sorry that we only found your card when we returned."

The doctor bowed in acknowledgment, and again there was silence.

Erna, in taking her handkerchief from the table, allowed the book she had been reading to slip from her hand; it glided smoothly over the satin robe and reached the floor.

Dr. Fortescue took it up, and his eye rested upon the title. "Torquato Tasso, in the original," said he, in pleased surprise.

"Yes," replied Erna, "I utilized the time while waiting for other guests, to read over the scene in which we are to appear. Although there is no speech, yet the attitude and expression of the face has much to do with the success of such representations. I hope they will prove a success for mamma's sake."

“And in order to do my part toward making them such,” said Dr. Fortescue, glancing at the book in his hand, “I should be indebted if you will give me some suggestions in regard to the position I am to assume.”

“I shall be glad to assist you in any way,” said Erna, flattered by the confidential tone he used in making the request.

Dr. Fortescue was an accomplished reader, and thanked his lucky destiny which gave him the opportunity to display his talent. His voice was deep and full, and naturally dramatic ; so he made the most out of the one page which contained the scene in which he was to be the hero.

Erna listened attentively, and her praise of the attitude and expression he assumed was hearty and sincere.

At that moment Fredrica, who was also one of the characters in the tableau, came in. Her costume was so brilliant that the doctor and Erna put their hands before their eyes as though dazzled.

“Excuse me for being blinded,” said Fortescue, archly ; “but such magnificence I never imagined.”

“You are very excusable,” said Fredrica, laughingly ; “it is the sun through the rose-colored curtains that makes my brilliants so dazzling.”

“You look really queenly, mamma,” said Erna, affectionately.

“Oh, you young people can afford to pay compliments to old married people who have had their day.” and Fredrica smiled, well pleased. “But I came to tell you, my dear, that the guests are arriving, and those who are to take part in the tableau are already in the dressing room, and will very soon make their appearance here. As our scene is near the first, I am glad we are all ready.”

The entertainment was opened with an overture from Egmont, by the stringed band engaged for the occasion, followed by the representation of Egmont and Klarchen ; then, after another fine performance by the band, came the scene from Torquato Tasso, so regal in its magnificence that it had to be repeated several times. This was followed by Hermann and Dorothea, then Faust and Gretchen, Wertha and Lotta, and many others of equal beauty. Altogether it was the most brilliant set of tableaux which had ever been managed by Fredrica, whose success was well known, and who was charmed with the appreciation they so well merited.

Then stage and curtains were removed, and other amusements took the place of the mimic scenes. All

who had taken part in them retained their costumes during the evening, except Erna, who being cumbered with her train, and laughingly telling them that she feared a princess among them would cause a feeling of restraint, slipped away to her own room. However, she soon returned, robed in soft white muslin, with crimson roses in her hair and upon her bosom, and all silently agreed that she was equally charming in that simple attire.

It was Erna's first party, and she entered into the gayeties with the greatest pleasure. Dr. Fortescue, taking advantage of the opportunity offered him by being her partner in the tableau, acted as her cavalier all the evening.

There were many young officers present, for the harbor town was a military post, and their gay uniforms added much to the brilliancy of the room. Dr. Fortescue wore no uniform, but its absence was not a disadvantage to him in the eyes of the fair girls, for he was handsome, of commanding presence, and quite conspicuous among the epauleted and gallooned gallants who squared their shoulders and marched so proudly about the spacious rooms.

Dr. Fortescue was a comparative stranger in the town, but he had letters of introduction which he pre-

sented to Herr Stark and other prominent residents when he first came among them. His handsome face and polished manners had done more for him, so far as society was concerned, than his letters, and the patronage of the Starks had won him a place in the best circles.

The only drawback with him was a shallow purse ; and this he resolved to remedy by a rich marriage. And even before Erna left school or he had seen her, he resolved to win her for his wife, if it were possible. In this undertaking he looked for the assistance of Fredrica. Through her acknowledged respect for him, he was upon the pinnacle of popularity. No one asked who he was or whence he came, society being satisfied to follow where Fredrica led, and really wondering how it managed to exist before he came.

Dr. Fortescue was playing a role not natural to him, that of an earnest and sincere man ; but he was willing to put this restraint upon himself for the sake of the object in view, the winning of Erna. He therefore looked upon the usual attentions from other young men with jealous eyes, and being an adept at expedients made some excuse to cause them to leave her side.

It had been truly an enjoyable evening, and the time to separate was at hand. Dr. Fortescue, in return-

ing to the banqueting room for his handkerchief, which he had left there, saw Hortense Moran standing by one of the alcoves. Mademoiselle was a beautiful brunette, and of excellent family, but poor; and Fredrica, with her artistic love of beauty, always saw that she was becomingly dressed, as became the companion of Phillis and a protégé of hers. So this evening Hortense was arrayed in a charming crimson gown, which set off her raven hair and colorless complexion to the best advantage.

Fredrica was independent in her feelings, and had an assured position in society. It was one of her theories that a person who was suitable for the constant society of her child was suitable for that of the family and should be treated as one of them. Therefore, Mademoiselle was one of the merry company that evening and all evenings, and Fredrica would have been quick to resent any want of affiliation on the part of her guests.

Dr. Fortescue had always paid her much attention, but that evening every thought had been for Erna, and securing his handkerchief he was about to return to the drawing-room, when Hortense, pale with anger and excitement, intercepted him.

“You are flirting again, Dr. Fortescue?” ex-

claimed she, bitterly ; “ do I not see that you have ears and eyes only for Fräulein Erna ? ”

“ Dear Hortense,” exclaimed he, hastily, “ the gods know that it is only pretense. You and you alone occupy my thoughts ; and you must know how I long for a quiet talk with you instead of this garish scene.”

“ You fickle creature, you know there is but one God ; and he will surely punish you for your falsehoods to me,” exclaimed she, with tear-dimmed eyes.

Frau Fredrica had often noticed the coquettish airs of Hortense, but never for a moment imagined that Dr. Fortescue had ever given her reason for supposing that he cared for her any more than for any other young lady under her care.

She had always had it in mind, since her acquaintance with Dr. Fortescue that Erna would some time be his wife ; and she had no patience with the flirtation between him and Hortense. She believed that money was all that was necessary to secure his success in life. Erna was an heiress, and the money inherited from her mother was at her own disposal. Fredrica was one who could not bear a rival in the management of her home ; she wished to reign supreme, and could not feel that she was sole mistress now that a grown

daughter of the house was under its roof. And, to do her justice, she really believed that the happiness of Erna would be secured by a union with Dr. Fortescue. She had a fear that Herr Stark would raise some objections, but thought that he could be won over to her way of thinking. That the doctor would flirt with the young French girl was in the eyes of Fredrica very reprehensible; and she showed her displeasure by calling Hortense, and giving her a message that would take her from the room. In a short time afterward the guests departed, the light was extinguished and the party was a thing of the past.

Erna retired to her room, but not to sleep; her thoughts were too busy with the events of the day. Into what a fairyland had she been ushered, and what a beautiful existence would she enjoy after the dull life of a school girl; Dr. Fortescue being the central figure of this new life.

How melodious was his voice, how gentle his tone when addressing her, how distinguished his appearance in a crowd of young people, all more or less distinguished and handsome! How superior was he to all the young men with whom she had become acquainted! And she recalled many words which he

had spoken that evening, which betokened an interest in her.

Erna had taken the large chair by the window where she had sat the first evening of her return, and as on that evening her thoughts were busy with the past. She was yet in her party toilette, and her bright eyes and unfaded cheek showed that the excitement and fatigue of her first evening in society had produced no wearying effect upon her.

She called to mind her beautiful stepmother so winning and attractive; so light-hearted, and apparently oblivious that there could be such a thing as sorrow and trouble in the world. She assuredly was happy.

Her eyes involuntarily sought the portrait of her mother, and the sweet, mild countenance gave to her thoughts another channel.

Did her own mother enjoy society in her youth as she and Fredrica were doing? She died so young! Did death end all happiness for her? Would it end all the happiness she was just commencing to experience? Was death the end of all happiness? Who could solve for her this riddle of life? What was the use of laying plans for happiness, when, perhaps the next day, the next hour, one would be

extinguished like a torch, or disappear like a soap-bubble?

She shook her head as though she would gladly put aside all such thoughts. Why should such reflections come to her in this, the happiest hour of her life?

Her stepmother, she supposed, never troubled herself with such thoughts. She was a practical woman and took life as she found it, never given to musings over that which would only render her dissatisfied and miserable. Yes, it was better to follow her example; to look upon the present as the only thing she could claim, to live for to-day, and to-morrow——

There again was the question which had before confronted her. Well, sleep would bring forgetfulness, and when to-morrow's sun should awaken her, its cheering beams would dispel these sad, perplexing visions of the night. And thinking thus, she sought her repose.

CHAPTER V.

HELP IN NEED.

FREDRICA had waited impatiently for the opening of the Baths, for the physician had given her much encouragement as to their beneficial effects upon Phillis; but the season was cold and rainy, and it was near the middle of July when the elegant equipage of Herr Stark drew up before the entrance of the sanitarium.

There were many persons gathered in the reception room, and they pressed to the windows to see the new arrivals and make their comments upon the courtesy which the crusty and reserved physician in charge was showing them; and they took it for granted that Fredrica and her daughter were people of consequence.

When they entered the reception room followed by Hortense, chairs were immediately provided for them, while many who had been there a long time were standing, watching eagerly for a vacant bathroom, and were somewhat envious on account of the distinction made.

In spite of the embarrassment of seeing so many

strangers, Phillis immediately singled out her old friend Frau Ehlert, who sat pale and silent in a secluded corner of the apartment, unnoticed. The others, who sat in groups of twos and threes, were talking volubly, and to her the stay in the room was anything but agreeable. She was glad to see little Phillis, and Fredrica noticed how happy they seemed to be in each other's society.

"Mamma," said Phillis, returning, "Frau Ehlert is pale and almost sick from waiting so long; won't you please go and speak to her, and maybe you can get them to give her a place earlier."

"I am afraid not, my child. These people are vexed enough now that we are to be served before them, but we will see what we can do for her after your bath is over."

In a few minutes a messenger came to notify Frau Stark that the bath was ready, and taking Phillis by the hand she left the room.

When they returned, they sought the corner where Frau Ehlert was still waiting, and Phillis with great pride presented her mother and her friend to each other.

"You have been so kind to my little daughter, and she has spoken so much of you, that I feel acquainted

with you," said Frau Stark, pleasantly "and am glad of this opportunity of meeting you. As you see, my little girl is very delicate, and has frequent attacks of illness. That was the case quite recently, and she had to remain in bed several days, her chief trouble being that she could not meet you upon the strand."

At the attention paid to the poor woman by the rich and elegant Frau Stark, all eyes were turned toward her, but this was of little account to Frau Ehlert, in comparison with the pleasure she felt in seeing little Phillis. She was cheered by the kindness of Fredrica, but gave not the least evidence of being flattered by the condescension of the great lady, while she was as gentle and unembarrassed as usual.

"You will excuse my not rising to speak to you," said she. "I am very weak, for I have been waiting at least two hours for a vacancy, and may perhaps have to wait two hours longer."

Dr. Wagner at that moment appeared again, with the intention of escorting Frau Stark to her carriage.

"How is this, doctor?" questioned she, in a quick, stern tone; for, though amiable, she could show resentment when occasion offered.

"What is it, gracious lady?" said he, bowing obsequiously.

“Frau Ehlert has a card for the baths ; why has she been kept waiting ?”

“Because that is the rule of the place, gracious lady ; those who have cards like hers must wait until those who have cards for the first-class are served. You see how many are here waiting.”

“But how much longer must she wait ? She has been here two hours, and more people are coming all the time. What are you thinking of, doctor ? You, as a physician, ought to know what I can see at the first glance, that Frau Ehlert is the most delicate person in the room. The long wait in this confused place will do her more harm than the bath will do her good.”

“I don’t see how it can be helped, madam,” replied the doctor, in an injured tone, and somewhat angry.

Fredrica’s face flushed, and her eyes flashed with indignation at his change of manner. She was not accustomed to having her wishes slighted.

“Can’t be helped, doctor !” said she, coldly. “I say that it must be helped ; and will see that it is.”

She took a dozen bathing cards of the first-class from her pocket-book, such as, owing to their price, were only bought by those who had means, and pressed them into the hand of Frau Ehlert.

“Give me your bath cards, dear Frau Ehlert,” said she, in a different tone from that used with the doctor, “and you must use mine. Come with me, and I will see that you have your bath immediately.”

Frau Ehlert had expected to be at her lodging house long before, and had partaken of a very light breakfast of bread and coffee, so was faint from hunger and weariness. Frau Stark was not slow to observe this, and sending a messenger to the nearest bakery, had a fresh roll and a glass of new milk brought to her. She gladly partook of it, and feeling strengthened, rose and followed Frau Stark, who could not avoid giving Dr. Wagner a triumphant look as she passed him.

Fredrica's interest in the friend of Phillis increased as she became acquainted with her, and having the means of gratifying the benevolent feelings of the moment, she was determined to carry out the plan of benefiting her as far as money could assist. She was grateful to Frau Ehlert for the interest she had taken in Phillis, and knew that Herr Stark would be satisfied with whatever she did in the matter.

The joy of Phillis was great that her mother was doing something to help her friend, and her happiness caused her to look so much brighter that Fredrica was

charmed that in benefiting the stranger she was also benefiting her child.

“I will take you home with me if agreeable to you,” said she, when they returned to the reception room; “you are too weary to walk, and I will send you to the cottage this evening, when it is cooler, if you desire to go.”

“Oh, yes, do come with us,” said Phillis, clapping her hands in glee.

Frau Ehlert gladly accepted the invitation; and when she reached the large, cool, quiet room to which she was conducted, and was kindly invited to lie down and rest until dinner was served, she thanked her Father in heaven for his great goodness to her, and dropped into a peaceful sleep. Phillis was jubilant over the thought that her dear old friend was so unexpectedly under the roof of her parents.

“You need not go from here,” said she, when Frau Ehlert, having partaken of dinner, again went to her room. “I wish you would stay, and go with us every day to the Baths; then they would not make you wait so long that you get sick in consequence.”

A new thought came into the mind of Fredrica upon hearing this, and as soon as convenient she spoke to her husband in regard to it. “I am per-

fectly willing that you should have her here if you wish it," replied he, kindly, in response to her request.

"There is the large room in the back building, near that of old Anna," said Fredrica, reflectively. "It is cool and pleasant, with sufficient sun to make it healthful, and no doubt is far preferable to the little stuffy rooms in the fisherman's cottage where she lodges."

"Yes, she will have many advantages here; and it will not cost her anything to be with us. My wife understands the art of making people comfortable, and can do her share toward making the poor lady have a pleasant time."

"Thank you for your willingness to agree to my plan, and also for the compliment," laughed Frau Stark, as she hastened away to tell Phillis' friend of the arrangement made for her comfort.

It was not difficult to read in the expressive countenance of Frau Ehlert the delight with which she welcomed the proposal. A flush of pleasant surprise passed over her pale features, and she clasped her hands in joyous gratitude, as she thanked Fredrica heartily.

While Fredrica was talking to her, Herr Stark came into the library adjoining in search of a book, and found little Phillis seated quietly by the window

looking out ; so he took a place beside her, with his book.

He heard his wife leave the room, and then the gentle voice of Frau Ehlert, who knew not that she was heard except by the One who hears even the feeblest cry to him : “ Father in heaven, thou art gracious and merciful ; always mindful of those who put their trust in thee ; let thy choicest blessings rest upon this home ; return in full measure the compassion they have shown to me, a pilgrim and a stranger.”

“ She is praying,” whispered Phillis, in an awed voice ; and both remained perfectly silent.

“ Where will this end ? ” thought Herr Stark, as he listened. “ Can it be that God has accepted my sincere repentance, and has sent her in response to my earnest prayers in behalf of my child ? Has God indeed taken pity on me ? ”

“ She prayed for us, papa ; she loves us for being good to her,” whispered Phillis, with tears in her blue eyes, while Herr Stark wondered, somewhat anxiously, what would be the result when Fredrica should realize the religious nature of the stranger whom she had welcomed under her roof.

Only Frau Ehlert herself knew how opportune this great favor was to her ; and her heart was filled

with astonishment and gratitude to God who had put it into the hearts of these kind friends to help her.

She was a widow of a minister who had died several years before, leaving her with four boys, the eldest, Hermann, being but twelve years of age at the time. Friends of her loved husband had provided for the educating of them, and Hermann was now in the University, intending in accordance with his mother's dearest wish to be a minister. Franz was apprenticed to a bookbinder, the third son was with a druggist, and the youngest boy was with a relative during the mother's absence at the seashore.

Poor Frau Ehlert's health was broken; she dragged about from day to day, hoping to gain strength that she might keep a home for her boys. She came of a musical family, and in better times was a fine performer upon the harp and piano. She gave music lessons, but in the little town where she resided the sum she earned was small; still it helped to eke out the meagre annuity which she received. And she was looking forward to the time when Hermann, having finished his studies, would have a charge and they would all be together.

In the winter she had a severe attack of sickness, and her funds were almost exhausted. Her physician

recommended sea air and bathing, and her friends contributed funds for eight weeks' sojourn there, and presented her with a ticket to and from the Baths.

For economy's sake she arranged to take lodging at the fisherman's cottage and provide for herself. But she had not been there long when to her dismay she found her money melting away rapidly, provisions being much higher than she had anticipated. The Baths had become popular and fashionable, and poor Frau Ehlert saw that unless something intervened she would have to leave before there would be time to receive any benefit from them. In the early morning hours of that very day she had counted her money, and was depressed over the result; and when to this depression was added the weary waiting at the Bath house, she was almost in despair.

Frau Ehlert had for many years trusted to her Heavenly Father for her daily bread. He who had promised to be a father to the fatherless had never forsaken her. Often help had come in the most unexpected manner, just when the need was greatest, as it had that morning while sitting in the reception room; and she had offered up her childlike prayer of faith, already so signally answered.

Such experiences had led her to have a firm depend-

ence upon her Heavenly Father, who had in times of trouble scattered the clouds which encompassed her. She found comfort in prayer ; she found that what was best for her to have she received ; and full of gratitude, peace and contentment, she lay there in the cool, fragrant room which God had moved Frau Stark's heart to provide for her.

She was now free from all care and anxiety as to money matters, had good strengthening food, rode in a luxurious carriage to the Baths and received every attention while there, and was daily gaining strength. Phillis was so charmed with having her there that Fredrica felt repaid for her charitable act, and the back building, which heretofore was seldom visited by the little girl, became now her favorite spot.

Fredrica had no affinity for old Anna ; in truth, she disliked her, and if she could have gained her wish Anna would have been provided with a separate home long before.

"That old raven will bring trouble upon us," said she to her husband. "I do not like her, and I avoid her all I can ; I wish you would send her away."

But indulgent as was Herr Stark to his young wife, to this he would not consent ; he had promised Erna's mother that Anna should be kept in a good home

with them for life, if she chose to remain, and he would not break his promise. So as Frau Fredrica could not get rid of her, she avoided her all she could, and had infected Phillis with this reserve toward the innocent and faithful old servitor, who deeply felt the neglect.

She had looked forward to the time when Erna would be at home, and had comforted herself with the thought that there would be a change. As they should see the fondness of the elder daughter of the house for her old nurse, gradually they too would be won over to look upon her in the light of a humble friend, who would do anything in her power to give them a moment's happiness. Alas, there was a change, but it was in the feelings of Erna; for after that call on the morning following her return, she had never been inside Anna's room.

Once the old woman had become so wearied with longing to see her that she made bold to go into the house; but she found all so much engaged that they had no time to welcome her, and, feeling that she was not wanted, she remained only a few minutes and did not repeat the visit.

Ever since Fredrica's coming, Anna very seldom had gone into the main dwelling. Her presence was

not prohibited, but there was no real necessity for her going, and she saw that Fredrica wished no spy in her kingdom.

Occasionally when Erna would be walking in the garden she would see the wistful face of old Anna at the window of her little room, and would throw a kiss to her ; but with this exception there was but little cordiality evinced toward her by the other ladies.

The conversation she had with Anna on the Sabbath morning after her return convinced Erna that their paths were far apart ; the remembrance of it was not pleasant, and she resolved not to run the risk of having it repeated. As for the new guest under the house roof, Erna scarcely thought of her ; all her attention being given to her own pleasures and the young friends who helped her to make time fly so merrily.

“Just to think that I have taken a Frau Pastor under my wing,” Fredrica had remarked to her the next morning after Frau Ehlert had been inducted into her pleasant room. “I declare I don’t know what possessed me not to suspect that she belonged to the pious clique. What will our friends think of me, knowing my horror of canting psalm singers and such like fanatics.”

“Oh, well, mamma,” replied Erna, scarcely able to restrain a smile at Frau Fredrica’s evident chagrin, “as it is so, I would try to make the best of it, and not let our friends know that it was a mistake on your part.”

“You may be sure I shall hold a high head in the affair, now that the thing is done, and can’t be helped; but what puzzles me is that I should walk with open eyes into such a trap, and never ask a question, when I have always been so particular as to the acquaintances to whom Phillis takes a fancy. I suppose goody-goody people would call it a special providence; I call it one of the most embarrassing misadventures it has been my lot to meet.”

From the time of Frau Pastor Ehlert’s coming, a new life commenced for Phillis, and Fredrica became more reconciled to the state of affairs when she saw what a change the companionship of the gentle Christian lady made in the excitable, spoiled child; and was compelled to acknowledge that she was a much more desirable companion for her darling than the gay and frivolous Hortense.

Phillis and her old friend were inseparable, and it was often a mystery to the mother what the child saw in the plain and quiet woman, of whose society she

never wearied. She noticed that the selfishness which had characterized Phillis had entirely disappeared, and with it the fits of crying which Fredrica had dreaded, knowing them to be of injury to the delicate and nervous child.

During the bathing season Herr Stark's mansion was filled with guests, and it was a great relief to Fredrica to have Phillis in such safe and good care as that of Frau Ehlert; although, to do her justice, the thought of any advantage to herself in having her there had never occurred to her mind when she invited her to stay.

The return of her young stepdaughter added much to the gayety, and parties upon the water, driving parties and evening entertainments followed in quick succession, and there was seldom an evening which was not engaged.

Dr. Fortescue was much in demand in all these festivities, and his talents as a society man, had full play.

Herr Stark, on the contrary, drew more and more within himself. Society wearied him, and he was even sadder than he was usually. Fredrica's time was so much taken up with her guests and Phillis, that she had not noticed his failing health, and Erna's hands

were full of the requirements of social life; so that Herr Stark was as much alone as he was before she came home.

Dr. Fortescue was much in Erna's society; he was in her eyes all that was noble and good, and she saw none worthy to be compared with him. On his part all that could be said was that he loved her as well as he was capable of loving any one, and knowing that she was wealthy he intended winning her for his wife. He was intensely selfish, lived for the pleasures of this life alone, and had no care whatever for the hereafter. Justice and injustice had no meaning for him further than they suited his convenience; he believed in no retribution for sin, no reward for a well-spent life. He considered the moralities of civilization as a yoke about one's neck; he mocked at religion, and even the laws of civil life he would have transgressed had there not been penalties attached to the offences.

He did his best to make himself a place in Erna's good opinion, and knowing her to be sincere and truthful, his falseness was at least kept in the background.

Had Herr Stark and his family been Christians, and attentive to church services and duties, Dr.

Fortescue, knowing that his views upon the subject of religion were well known, never would have dared aspire to her hand; but they were all alike in that respect. If their views were correct upon the subject, so were his; if he was in error, so too, were they. This circumstance gave him the assurance to decide to ask her hand in marriage. Had Erna Stark been a child of God she would have shrunk with horror from the thought of being united to a professed unbeliever, and he would not have dared request her hand.

Although Dr. Fortescue knew they were alike in their views of religion, yet he did not forget that there was a vast difference in the natures of Erna and himself, and often compared himself to Mephistopheles, and felt like warning her to beware of him. At such times a longing came over him to be as innocent, as unselfish, as truthful as she; and so far, the love he felt for her was of benefit to him. He almost longed for some power that he could rely upon to keep him in the path of right, while at times he scoffed at the weakness that led him to think of such a state of dependence. His past life was not pleasant to think upon, and he would have been glad to obliterate it from memory. His house was indeed built upon the sand and was without a firm foundation.

Dr. Fortescue's mother had died when he was an infant, and his father, though a German, did not return to his native land, but left Paris for America, to join a colony which had settled in Wisconsin and had taken the name of New Germany. The colony had no church, no pastor, and religion was not thought of. In this atmosphere young Fortescue Stark grew up, as wild and reckless as it was possible to be.

His father had given him a good education, and after he left the settlement he concluded to return to Paris for the study of medicine. From Paris he went to Germany to visit the distant relatives of his father, and there he remained.

This then was the man whom Erna Stark had chosen from all the world to walk by her side. Without religion they were without a guiding star; were like a vessel without a compass on the stormy sea of life.

CHAPTER VI.

HERR STARK'S PROMISE.

SUMMER was on the wane, and the weeks that had been specified by Frau Ehlert as the limit of her stay were over; but owing to the cordial and pressing invitation of Frau Fredrica she was to remain.

It had been a happy summer for Erna; so happy that she did not care to think of anything but the present. She had but one wish, and that was that life might be always as beautiful as it was then.

But Fredrica was not quite so well satisfied. She longed for the time when Dr. Fortescue would take Erna from the homestead, leaving the young step-mother queen of the realm, as she had been before Erna came. She was not the bright particular star in the society firmament, now that a young and beautiful and popular girl was there to share the entertaining and do the honors of the house; and although too amiable and just to resent it upon Erna, and too polite to allow the world to know her mind, none the less was she anxious to have Erna away. Nothing had heretofore disturbed her plans; she had no need to

consult any one, but was as untrammelled in her daily life both at home and in society as it was possible to be.

She was impatient with the want of decision in Dr. Fortescue ; she wondered why he hesitated and dallied, when all that was required was to stretch out his hand for the prize. She admired him and admired Erna, and believed they would be happy together ; then why not marry ? He was poor, but Erna had enough for both ; and who among all her acquaintances was to be compared to him ?

It was during this time that Frau Ehlert, deeply grateful for the kindness shown her, spoke of giving up the room where she had passed so many pleasant hours with Phillis, and the pleasant walk by the sea, to return to her home.

“ Why need you go ? ” said Frau Fredrica, in her hospitable way ; “ you can still take the baths, which are doing you so much good ; and Dr. Wagner says you should stay as long as possible. You need not be troubled about the money. I will see to that. You will do me a real kindness to stay. Phillis is an entirely different child since you came ; she has not had a crying spell for a long time, and I can see a great improvement in her in every way.”

“I will remain a little while longer, gladly and deeply grateful for your kindness.” And thus it was decided that Frau Ehlert was yet to remain an honored guest in the home of the wealthy Herr Stark.

The total estrangement of the family from church was for a time unnoticed by Frau Ehlert, owing to her room being so secluded and she not being inquisitive; besides, the thought had never occurred to her that people could live away from God. She always set out early for church, being compelled to walk slowly, and on returning went immediately to her room, remaining there until summoned to dinner, throughout the day seeing nothing of Herr and Frau Stark except at meals.

The ignorance of Phillis upon religious subjects was a surprise to Frau Ehlert, but she supposed that it was owing to her ill health and nervousness that not anything requiring thought was urged upon her.

Now that she was becoming stronger, Frau Ehlert believed that she could not repay the kindness of the Stark family better than by instructing the little one, gradually and pleasantly, in things that pertain to eternal life. These were generally imparted in the form of entertaining narratives, eagerly listened to by Phillis.

Frau Ehlert would tell her of incidents which had come within her own knowledge, or were found in books she had read ; and Phillis called to mind the fact that often she had asked her mother to read to her from the books which so interested herself, and had been told that they were not suitable for children. Costly picture books had Phillis in abundance, but they were not enjoyed as was the plainest story told in simple words by Frau Ehlert.

Fredrica spoke frequently to her guest of the great improvement in Phillis, and thanked her heartily for making her happy, by her kindness in being willing to entertain her and in being her society. For Fredrica in all her social life never had her hands so full as during that summer in providing amusements for her guests, which the bathing season and her beautiful stepdaughter's first appearance in society made necessary. And she had not time to question Phillis ; she only knew that she was happy and contented, and that was enough.

On his part, Herr Stark knew perfectly well in what direction the child's attention was being drawn, and his heart went out in gratitude to the poor woman who was following the guidance of her conscience in trying to do good in whatever way she could. He

had suffered much in regard to the spiritual welfare of his children, and though he felt himself an alien from his God, at times he took comfort from the thought that it was perhaps because of his earnest petitions that this Christian woman was permitted to come among them.

One evening Frau Ehlert and Phillis were seated in an arbor in the garden, and not far from them was Anna, engaged in weeding the little plot of ground in which she cultivated flowers and vegetables for her own use. Years before, Herr Stark had given her this portion of the large garden, and she was a skillful gardener, and took pride in keeping it in perfect order.

Frau Ehlert had become well acquainted with and thoroughly respected her. They had a bond of sympathy in their love for the Saviour, and many times rejoiced together over the great joy in store for those who love and serve him.

"Aunt Ehlert, won't you please tell me the story you told me last Sunday, of the little heathen child? It is beautiful," said Phillis.

"Do you mean Saco Naso?"

"Yes, the sickly little boy who did not remain a heathen, but became a Christian and was baptized."

“I believe you know the story quite as well as I,” smiled her companion; “it would be pleasant to have you relate it to me.”

“Yes, I know it; but I so love to hear you tell it.”

“Well, this little boy, Saco Naso, was a heathen. He knew not the true God, but worshiped idols made of wood and stone. His father was a heathen also, and having heard of a missionary, quite a distance away, who was teaching the people to know the true and only God and the Saviour of the world, he walked all the way there to have all explained to him.”

“Yes,” supplemented Phillis, eagerly; “and the grandfather did not wish him to take his four boys, but he did take them, all except Saco, who was not able to walk so far. He wished his sons to hear all the missionary said, so that among them, not a word should be lost.”

“You are right; all went but little Saco. He was but seven years old, yet could read in his own language, and his father had hoped to educate him for a teacher among his people. Saco watched anxiously for the return of his father and brothers; and then what joy it was to him and to his mother and little sisters to hear of the dear Saviour who died for them, and to know what was required of them in order to be saved.

“They talked of all these things, and their hearts were filled with the love of that Saviour in whom they believed and trusted, and on Sabbath morning the missionary came, and all were baptized in the beautiful river which ran close by their hut.”

“And little Saco did not wish to keep his heathen name, but desired one which belonged to Christians,” said Phillis, eagerly.

“Yes; he asked to have his name changed to Johannes, and his parents gave consent,” replied Frau Ehlert, “his joy in being a child of God being past expression.”

“And after he was baptized he wished to have on his new clothes,” said Phillis.

“Yes; the missionary gave him a suit that some church ladies in America had sent him. He called them his ‘Christian clothes.’”

“And the Bible!” cried Phillis, rapturously; “don’t forget about the Bible.”

“No; little Saco had heard about the Bible which told what the Saviour had suffered, and he wished for one. And one day, several weeks after he had been baptized, his father procured one for him. He had gradually grown so weak that he was unable to sit up; so it was placed upon the bed beside him. Time

passed on, and one day he asked to have his Christian clothes put upon him, for he was about to go to his heavenly home. They clothed him in them, and with the Bible in his arms, he fell asleep to awaken in heaven, his last words being, 'My Saviour, my dear, dear Saviour.'"

"If I love the Saviour will he take me to live with him, and will I have no more sickness nor pain, but be always well? Will I be happy, as was little Saco?"

"If you love God and obey him you are his child, and when you are called from earth he will take you to live with him in his heavenly home."

"Oh, I do love him, and believe that he loves me, and will take me to his home in heaven, where I shall always be happy and never be sick any more." And tears of joy rolled down her thin cheeks.

At that moment old Anna came toward them, and turning her pale, sad face to Frau Ehlert, she spoke a few words in a low tone, that only she might hear.

Upon a bank back of the arbor, under the shade of a large tree, sat Herr Ludwig Stark, his heart wrung with sorrow for the distress of his child, but with no words of comfort to offer. She thought she was a heathen and would be lost. His sympathies were also for Frau Ehlert, who held the sorrowing

child in her arms, and for old Anna, who stood before them pale and trembling, but whose conscience, which would not let her keep silent, now refused to make her sorry for what she had done, save for the pain it had given Phillis.

“I knew that this would come, yet knew not how to prevent it. God pity me that I have turned from him and forgotten the faith of my sainted wife and my mother,” thought he, bitterly; and rising, he went to the arbor, and, sitting by Frau Ehlert, took the weeping child in his arms and laid her head upon his breast.

“Do not weep, little Phillis,” said he, kissing her flushed forehead; “for papa’s sake, do not weep any more.” And rising, he led his daughter to the house.

At the entrance they met Fredrica, her beautiful eyes beaming with joy over a sailing party in prospect: “And we want you to join us, dear Ludwig, and will not be satisfied until you say yes,” said she, coaxingly.

Herr Stark thought he had never seen his Fredrica more beautiful than at that moment, so full of animation and happiness was she, so graceful and charming, so light hearted, and apparently free from care.

“I do not think I can go with you, my darling; but

will be on hand, and meet you at the landing upon your return."

"You never have time for me, Ludwig," said she, poutingly; "but," continued she, anxiously, "what ails my little Phillis? She has been weeping. She has not enough amusement, poor little one. I will take her to-day upon the water."

"I think it scarcely advisable to take her," said Herr Stark; "the afternoons are short and the evenings are cool, and the doctor directed us to allow her to run no risk of damp air."

"Well, then, Hortense can take her to the lighthouse, and as we pass, little Phillis can throw flowers toward our boat. She can stand on the shore and hear the music and see the pretty flags and streamers. Will not that be nice, Phillis?"

"Yes, mamma; and the very prettiest flowers I will throw toward you, as I did the last time you went sailing."

"Well, let us hasten to the housekeeper about our early dinner, and to Mademoiselle Hortense in regard to a pretty costume for you," said the mother, cheerily. And taking the hand of Phillis, they flitted away.

Hortense was seated by a table busied, apparently,

with a slip of embroidery, but in her apron, with her silks, was a letter which, in her haste to conceal it, she dropped upon the floor. She stooped to pick it up, hoping to hide the sudden flush which rose to her cheek ; but Phillis reached it first and gave it into her hand, though not before Frau Fredrica had read the address upon it, and seen that it was in the handwriting of Dr. Fortescue.

Since the memorable evening of the tableaux, Frau Fredrica had seen nothing to awaken suspicion, yet she had not forgotten the flirtation of that evening, and her feeling toward Hortense in consequence was anything but friendly.

She had reason for believing that matters were progressing finely with Dr. Fortescue and Erna, and had thought that perhaps that very evening the betrothal would be announced. For as he consulted herself and Erna that day in regard to the sailing party, she noticed that he seemed disturbed and somewhat nervous, from which she was encouraged to believe that he intended that evening to be the turning point of his destiny.

Frau Fredrica was a born matchmaker, and, where any interest to herself was concerned, could plan effectively. Therefore she resolved that if it depended

upon her, the opportunity should not be wanting for him to speak while upon the sailing party.

Frau Fredrica could read the signs of the times better than the majority of people, and many times had her husband and Erna smiled over her astute divinings; and they, as well as others, almost looked upon her as a prophetess.

She resolved, therefore, that the discovery she had made of the letter addressed to Hortense should be kept to herself, well knowing that the information would not promote her plans.

She was incensed at Fortescue for his falseness, and wished to punish him in some way. She thought of planning some excuse to postpone the marriage, which she was quite sure would soon follow the betrothal; but, well knowing that the punishment would be greater to herself than to him, she concluded it better policy not to risk it.

Afternoon came. A soft west wind was gently agitating the waters of the sea, and three pleasure boats were gently rocking near the shore, awaiting the gay party. The company was headed by a full band of musicians, who were coming, gayly chatting and laughing, from the home of the Starks, where they had agreed to meet.

Dr. Fortescue and Erna were in the last boat; which Fredrica, noticing, resolved should be her place also; and soon all were bounding over the white-capped waves.

In a few moments they neared the lighthouse, where stood Hortense and Phillis, waiting for the boat in which was Frau Stark to come nearer, that Phillis might throw the flowers.

Hortense was so deeply absorbed in watching Dr. Fortescue, who had bent his stately head and was whispering something to Erna, that she entirely forgot Phillis, who had stepped upon a stone which was moist and slippery. A cry of terror caused all upon the boat to glance toward Fredrica, and then toward the shore. Phillis had disappeared beneath the waves.

Had not strong hands grasped Fredrica she would have plunged into the sea to save her darling; and her cries for help to rescue her were truly pitiable.

“Darling, I will bring your little sister back to you,” said Dr. Fortescue to Erna, whose white lips could not frame a reply before he sprang overboard and struck out for the drowning child.

There was terrible anguish and suspense on the boats when the doctor rose to the surface without Phillis; but he was not intending to relinquish the

search. He dived again, and after a time that seemed ages to the wretched mother, he was seen swimming toward the boat holding Phillis upon one arm.

The whole affair had happened so quickly that Phillis scarcely lost consciousness, but she was bewildered by the strange faces about her, while Fredrica wept for joy on finding her darling safe.

"Where have I been that I got so wet?" inquired Phillis, wonderingly.

"You fell into the sea, darling; and had it not been for Dr. Fortescue you would have been drowned."

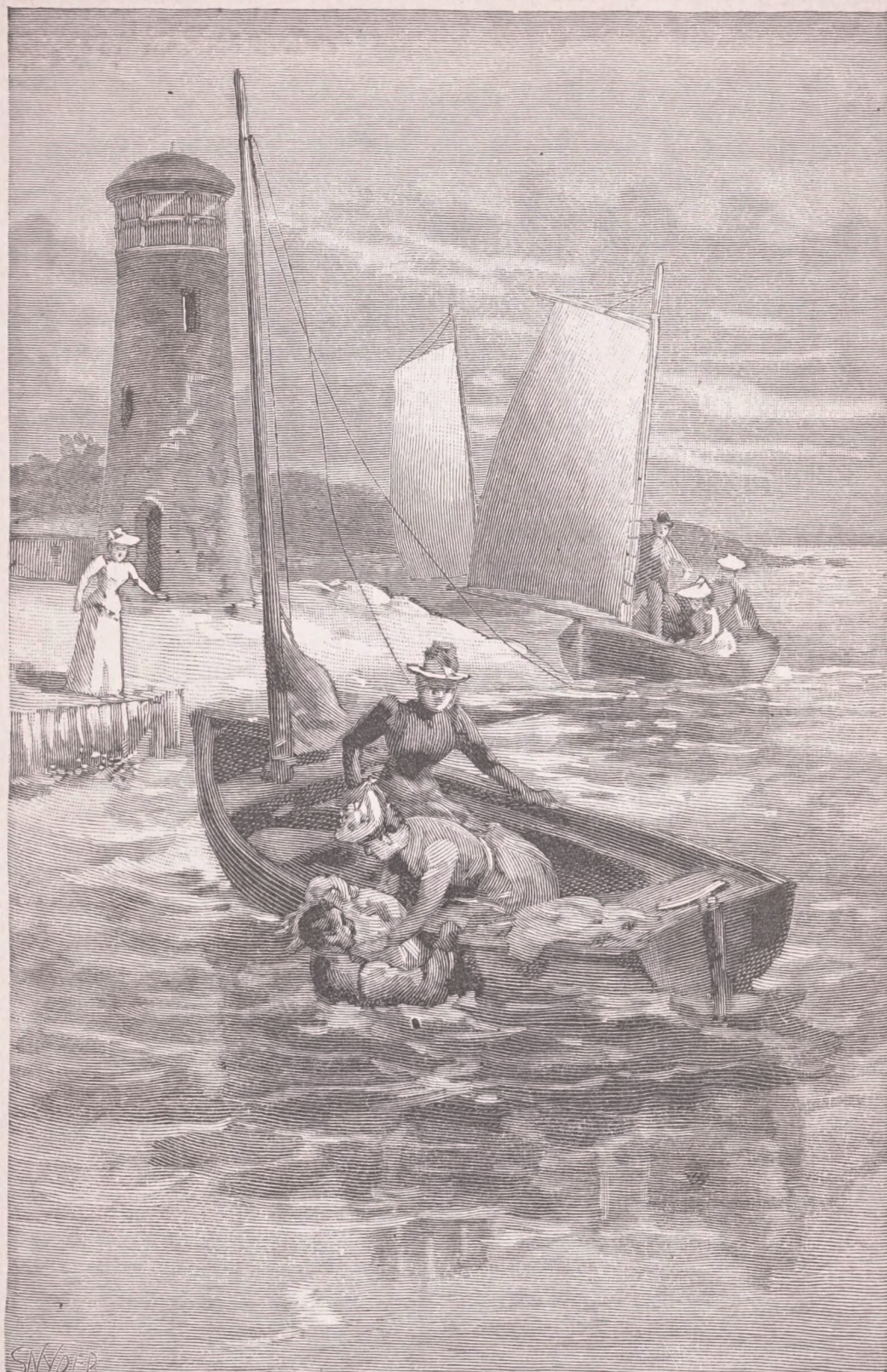
"I was near being drowned; near dying, and am a heathen," cried Phillis, clasping her hands in distress.

"Is she out of her mind, doctor?" cried Fredrica, in fright.

"No, she is perfectly conscious and rational," replied he.

"Who could have put such stuff into her head?" said Fredrica, angrily, as she strove to soothe her.

"Listen, Phillis," said Dr. Fortescue, sneeringly, while a cold glitter came into his eyes: "I have never believed, so I suppose I am a heathen, as you call it. But I must acknowledge that in spite of it I have as much pleasure in life as those who set up as models, and enjoy excellent health."



Erna Stark.

Erna shuddered at the tone as well as the words. Was that the same voice that had just breathed words of love to her, promising to be a guide and protector through life? She had been so happy in his love! Could she ever be so again? Would not the thought of this hour embitter her whole life? Could she be blind to the impression which he had made upon the pleasure-seekers, who appeared almost frightened at the speech and the manner of the speaker? Fredrica came to the rescue of the deliverer of her child, and with warmly expressed thanks bridged over the silence that had begun to grow noticeable.

He acknowledged her gratitude with graceful lightness, and said it was pleasant indeed to find himself lionized at such a small outlay of exertion; and that he had always sighed for some way in which to distinguish himself, but never supposed it would be in the direction of life-saving. He was at heart rejoiced over the achievement, believing that Erna's father would find it difficult to refuse to listen to the suit of one who had saved the life of his loved daughter.

In the meantime the boat was turned toward the shore, for it was important that Phillis should have her wet clothing removed at the earliest possible moment, and as soon as they landed Frau Fredrica

and Erna took her to a fisherman's cottage, and a suit of dry garments were provided for her. Others of the party hurried to the residence of Herr Stark to have the carriage sent to the landing for them, and Dr. Fortescue hurried to his hotel to change his soaked garments.

The news had reached Herr Stark at his office, and he was already on his way to the strand before the messenger could reach his dwelling. With joy he clasped his wife and child in his arms, both saved; for he had suffered agonies, having heard that Fredrica had plunged into the sea to save her child and that it was with difficulty that either was rescued.

Phillis, seated between her parents in the carriage, wept all the way home, the words of Dr. Fortescue having added another trouble to her already overburdened heart.

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE moment they reached home, Frau Stark had Phillis placed in bed and warm teas given her, hoping to ward off the danger to her health, because of her delicate constitution, the coolness of the water, and the length of time she had remained in her wet clothing.

Fredrica saw her comfortable, with Frau Ehlert by her bedside, and then returned to the parlor, where Herr Stark and Erna were talking of the accident.

“It is impossible to keep Hortense any longer,” said Fredrica, as she entered; “her presence will always remind me of this terrible day, and she must leave immediately.”

“Do you really think the poor girl so much to blame?” questioned Herr Stark, deprecatingly. “We all are liable to be off our guard at times, and no doubt she was terribly frightened at the result of her carelessness. It seems to me that that should be punishment enough.”

But this view of the case did not suit Frau Fredrica at all ; she had long wished for the opportunity to get the pretty French girl away from her house, looking upon her as an obstacle to her plans in regard to Dr. Fortescue and Erna, and she believed that her going would facilitate matters greatly.

She however felt a reluctance to tell Dr. Fortescue that she should send her away. Although the neglect of Phillis was a good excuse, yet she knew it would be unwelcome news to him, to whom she was so grateful for saving her child that she disliked to wound him. Still, she felt it must be done. If Hortense were well out of the way, his attention would not be attracted away from Erna ; the betrothal would be announced, the marriage speedily follow, Erna be in a house of her own, and Fredrica again sole autocrat in the Stark home.

To supply the place of Hortense, Fredrica intended making Frau Ehlert the offer of a good home at a good salary, and believed that she would accept. Thus all care for Phillis would be removed ; for governess, music teacher, companion, and friend would be secured in one.

Neither Herr Stark nor Frau Fredrica slept well that night, their nerves were so shaken by the acci-

dent which came near robbing them of their darling ; but Phillis slept better than usual, and the next day seemed well, as though nothing had happened.

Erna also passed a sleepless night, owing mainly to the fright and anxiety for the safety of Phillis and her rescuer ; but there was also another cause which drove slumber from her pillow. While in the boat before the accident, Dr. Fortescue told her that he had written to her father asking his consent to the marriage, and she had promised him to speak to her father in his behalf. But while not herself a Christian, she was distressed at the manner in which he had spoken to little Phillis in regard to the Christian faith. Though skeptical herself, she had never seen infidelity presented with such coarse brutality, and her refined and sensitive nature was really shocked.

She had in her anxiety mentioned the matter to Fredrica that evening, by the bedside of Phillis, and was rewarded by being thoroughly ridiculed in the following good-natured way :

“Why, my dear Erna, could you not see that it was done to make us feel comfortable? He was embarrassed by so much gratitude on our part, and tried to say something that would put us at our ease ; and his joking with Phillis was, I am sure, the very

best thing possible for her. Had he been serious in the matter and fostered the silly notion that had been put into her head, I don't know what evil result might have followed. I wonder at you, Erna, that you could not see his motive."

Erna loved Dr. Fortescue, and was willing to believe all that was said in his favor. She tried to forget his look when he said the things which had so grated upon her feelings, but hoped that all was as Fredrica said. She wished to think the very best of the one into whose keeping she had promised, with her father's consent, to place her earthly happiness.

The words of her little sister also rang in her ears and added to the care which robbed her of sleep: "I have never become a Christian; I am a heathen." And with them would return the sarcastic, sneering smile of her betrothed, and the words of her father in regard to him the night of her return from the pension. She feared that she never could have the same confidence in Fortescue as before the sailing party. She had no intention of breaking her promise of speaking to her father, but her bright hopes were clouded and her spirits saddened; her idol had feet of clay.

It was dawn before she closed her eyes in slumber,

and after an hour or two of uneasy and unrefreshing sleep, she arose and dressed, feeling a weight upon her spirits never before experienced.

Herr Stark arose late, and after partaking of breakfast he went to the library, where lay a letter upon his desk, awaiting his attention. He broke the seal, opened and read it to the end, while a frown settled upon his forehead and a paleness upon his lips. He perused it for the second time, then rose and paced the floor, anxiously.

“What have I been thinking of? Where have been my eyes?” thought he, bitterly, “that I have allowed this man to dare ask such a question of me? As poor as has been my opinion of him, I never imagined that he could have so little delicacy of feeling as to make his saving the life of one daughter a plea for asking the hand of another. Here he tells me that he has been accepted by Erna, and only awaits my sanction. I have been culpably negligent. I should have warned her against the arrogant, unprincipled man of whose early life we know nothing. It is really a painful thought to me.”

At that moment the door opened quietly and Erna looked in.

“Are you at leisure, papa?” she said, in a voice

unsteady from nervous embarrassment. "I wish to have a little conversation with you."

"Yes, come in, my Erna; I also wish to speak with you. You do not look as though you slept any better than your mamma and I. Was it because of Phillis that you are sad and your eyes are heavy?"

"Yes, papa, partly on that account; but I have other cares which kept me awake, and it was these which brought me so early to see you. Papa, Dr. Fortescue has asked me to be his wife."

"And what answer did you make, my Erna?"

"I love him, papa, and I told him I would be his, if you would consent. I told him I did not think you would object."

"I do object, Erna. I cannot help being opposed to it, and yet I feel deeply wounded to have to refuse my consent to the man who has just saved the life of my child."

Erna looked at her father in dumb surprise. That he would refuse positively to give consent had never crossed her mind, and she began to realize why Dr. Fortescue had requested her to speak for him. Her betrothed had been a welcome guest in the house, had never been looked upon as a stranger, but was treated almost as one of the family, and with her stepmother

as chaperon, she had gone constantly into society with him. What else could be expected than that they should become attached to each other? What had all their friends anticipated but that they would marry? To Erna's mind there was such great injustice in her father's decision against him that it created a sympathy in favor of Fortescue, and the adverse feeling against his manner the day before was almost obliterated.

Herr Stark waited a moment for her to speak, but as she was silent, he resumed the conversation.

"A stranger, whom we have only known a few months, without means, and with no business to speak of, has, I think, much presumption to raise his eyes to a daughter of mine. That he is poor would be no objection, were he in any way worthy of your love. It troubles me that he only lives for pleasure, and appears to take no interest whatever in obtaining a practice or in doing anything to earn an honest livelihood. I am a merchant and know the value of money, but I know you will believe me when I say that his poverty would be no objection were he in other respects a man who, in my opinion, would make you happy."

"Papa," said Erna, "I had no idea that you felt

so toward him. You saw us so much together, why did you not warn me before I learned to love him?"

"You love him, Erna?" said her father, in a pained voice. "Love excuses much, but it does not hinder bitter repentance when it is too late. Oh, my child, give up the thought of marriage with this man! Believe what I say to you."

"Papa, ask yourself if it be a light thing to cease to love. Since I have known him, my first waking thought has been of him, his name the last upon my lips ere I closed my eyes in sleep. You have loved, and know that it is easier to part with life than to turn from the one beloved. If you had warned me when I first became acquainted with him, your lightest wish should have been law to me. I would now blot him from my heart in obedience to your wish, but it is not in my power."

"Your censure of me is just, my Erna. It was not only thoughtless, but cruel in me not to warn you. I never thought of the likelihood of your loving him. To me he is anything but attractive, and it did not occur to me that you might think differently. Yet it is not too late, my daughter; let me hope that it is not too late. Listen to your father, whose greatest

wish is to see you happy. My conscience is burdened enough already; do not lay a new weight upon it."

"I would forget him, papa, if I could, but it is impossible. Could you, at the bidding of another, cast out your love for my blessed mother? Could you cast out your love for my beautiful stepmother?"

Erna sat down and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, while Herr Stark walked to and fro through the apartment.

"Hear me, my darling," said he at length, pausing before her; "my heart is burdened as the result of a mistake in my own life, which I wish to preserve you from making. It has made me old before my time; and I will say this to you, that in marriage one takes a choice between perpetual happiness and eternal perdition, between blessing and cursing; and of that I know whereof I speak. I only can prevail upon myself to do so in order to show you the precipice upon which you stand. If you will take my advice, you will give him up entirely; but if you are not willing, then I demand that you shall not marry him until he is established in some business. Idleness is the foundation of misery, and until he has a settled employment, I will not give my consent."

Erna listened attentively, and when her father had finished, she clasped his hand in hers and assured him that she would abide entirely by his decision.

Again Herr Stark walked back and forth through the apartment. The communication he was about to make would cost him much, but he would, at any suffering to himself, do all he could to save his daughter from the wretchedness which he believed would be hers should she marry Dr. Fortescue.

“As you know, my Erna,” said he, taking a chair in front of her, “the Starks are of an old and noble family, and for generations have had two distinguishing traits,—honor and piety. That was the rock upon which our house was founded. The parents were Christians, and the children were trained in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Your mother had all the virtues that contribute to the making of a noble woman. As deeply as I loved her, it is only in these later years that I appreciated her full worth. Her death was a terrible blow to me, but I knew where to go for comfort; and although my faith was but a glimmering torch, yet I realized that she whom I so loved was also the beloved of the Lord, that our separation would be but for a short time, and then we should meet in heaven, never again

to part. I promised her that I would train you to be a child of God.

“After some years I met my beautiful Fredrica,—you know how dear she is to me,—and knowing that you admire and love her, gives me courage to impart my troubles to you. God has endowed this gracious being with many gifts, and, as you say in regard to Dr. Fortescue, I loved her from the first moment of seeing her. How great would have been the blessing to me had she been trained in the belief and knowledge of sacred things. Instead, she has been trained to look upon the hereafter as a myth, and to scorn the revelations of the divine Word. I have yoked myself to an unbeliever, and it has weaned me from my church. That I have been thus influenced is evidence that my godliness had no firm foundation. I was a reed shaken by the wind. Again and again has my conscience been awakened, and I have longed for a guiding hand over me, a Saviour to go to in my troubles, feeling weak and helpless and alone. With this longing, I was also conscious that I was responsible for the spiritual welfare of my children. Your training was in accordance with the wishes of your stepmother, at an institution where the subject of religion in all its bearings was ignored, in order that

Jews, Catholics, or heathen could be consistently admitted there. This is the way that I have kept my promise to your mother. All the church ordinances which for generations have been the privileges of my family are, by my own fault, denied to me. Should I die, the bell would not be tolled for me, nor would my body be allowed to repose in the family vault of the Starks, where lie my wife and all my loved ones.

“All this is hard to bear, but it is not the worst. My soul hungers and thirsts for the strengthening of God’s love, longs for the ordinances of the church, and my heart now aches to learn that, by my neglect, little Phillis has to grieve that she is not a Christian. The Spirit of God has touched her childish heart, and I have the blessed conviction that the work begun will be finished. But in what way? That lies in darkness, kept from my questioning eyes. And you, my Erna, how stands it with you, who, in the early years of your life, had the training of your Christian mother? Through my negligence and want of care over you, you are upon the point of uniting yourself to one who, without shame, acknowledges himself to be an open enemy to all religion. Oh, Erna, pity your father; visit not this great responsibility upon

my grey hairs!" And with trembling voice he raised his sad eyes to her face.

Moved to tears, and dumb with grief and surprise, Erna looked into the pale face of her father, and clasping his hand in hers, she pressed her lips upon it. Of the possibility of such a sorrow for such a cause she had never imagined. She had known life only from its bright side. That her father, whom she loved and honored above all others upon earth, should have such trouble hidden in the depths of his heart, and should bring it forth to warn her of danger, was a revelation indeed. Long-forgotten remembrances of her early life came crowding to her inner vision, yet she could not summon courage to offer her love for Dr. Fortescue a sacrifice upon the altar of these remembrances.

What was to her the hope of blessedness in a future state? She had heard but fragmentary hints of such a future; it was as vague in her mind as a shadow or half-forgotten dream. The present was all she could claim, and it was sufficient for her; she asked and wished for nothing more. Was she asked to give up the sure present for the sake of the fabulous future? She longed to obey her father, yet her heart was heavy within her.

Herr Stark looked with anxious gaze upon his daughter and could read her thoughts in her expressive countenance. He said :

“I cannot expect you to see at once the value of the advice I am giving you ; it is all so unexpected to you. All I ask is time. Do not, without grave reflection, take a step which may embitter your whole life. Let Fortescue leave the city ; there is no opening here for him in his profession, and when he gets well established elsewhere, then let him return for you, and if you have not changed your mind, I will then offer no objection.”

“It shall be as you say, papa,” said Erna, with tear-dimmed eyes, “and I thank you for the confidence you have given me.”

“And one thing more, my Erna,” said he, detaining her as she arose to go ; “I have made a resolution to again unite with God’s people. The longing of Phillis for the love of Christ has paved the way, and Fredrica, who denies her child nothing, will give in, and for the rest God will care. But you, my darling Erna, comfort your father with the hope that you too will follow our lead.”

“I must think over it, dear papa. I am so confused and dulled by what I have heard that I cannot

frame an intelligent answer. I will do the best I can."

Herr Stark took her in his arms and kissed her forehead. "May God bless you, my loved one," said he; "you have taken a great burden off my heart,—a burden almost too heavy to be borne."

The father and daughter left the library, Erna to hasten to her room to think over all that had been said, while Herr Stark sought his wife.

The anger of Fredrica was past expression when she heard the result of the conversation. She wept; she bitterly upbraided him for his ingratitude toward Dr. Fortescue, who had saved the life of his child; she accused him for purposely thwarting her plans, hurled bitter sarcasms against his longings for a better life, and denounced religion as mummery and its votaries as frauds. But after her vials of wrath had become exhausted, she found all had been without avail; Herr Stark was immovable, and his obduracy being so unexpected, was the harder to endure. Was this defeat an evidence that the sceptre was about to pass out of her hands into those of her stepdaughter?

It added much to her vexation that the marriage was postponed for what she deemed a trifling cause; but she was compelled to submit, as was also Fortes-

cue, who called to bid the family good-bye, and saw only Fredrica. In token of her gratitude for saving the life of Phillis, she gave him a valuable diamond pin.

Frau Fredrica would have given evidence of her indignation in a very pronounced way in the days which followed had not a subject, which was even nearer at heart than that of Erna's marriage, occupied her thoughts and attention to the exclusion of everything else. The cold bath and wet clothing had been of no advantage to Phillis; she had taken a severe cold, fever had set in, and Fredrica was almost beside herself with anxiety.

Her fears were not groundless; the symptoms pointed to danger, and Dr. Wagner looked grave when he saw her. For two days and nights the child raved in delirium, and in all that time Fredrica never left the bedside. With haggard face, sunken eyes, and her beautiful golden hair disheveled, she looked no more the beautiful Fredrica who had graced the sailing party; and Herr Stark's heart was filled with anxiety for his wife as well as for his child. He besought her to take comfort. But poor Fredrica knew not where to turn for help in time of need; she had trusted to human hands and they had failed her.

At length there came a change, and Dr. Wagner, who had been faithful in his attendance, gave them hope; for Phillis slept.

It was now that Frau Ehlert proved herself invaluable to the anxious mother; for Fredrica was willing to take rest, knowing that the pastor's widow would keep faithful watch, and would inform her should she be needed. So, now that immediate danger was over, she and Erna were night watchers, and Fredrica was with her darling during the day.

It was in the silent watches of the night that Frau Ehlert and Erna became known to each other, and the young girl learned much by the bedside of her little sister. The conversation with her father had led her to reflect as she had never done before, and she often felt her heart thrill at the remembrance of the confidence reposed in her, imparted to her for her own good.

Frau Pastor Ehlert saw much to admire in the fair girl, who, until this sickness came, had been so brilliant, charming, and full of life, but who now, pale and anxious, sat patiently by the sick bed of Phillis, watching every change.

Frau Ehlert saw that her anxiety was not altogether for the little sister; she was dimly conscious that a

battle was being fought in the heart of the young girl, and could only pray that the victory might be in favor of the right. Old Anna, in her dim little room prayed, thanking God who had sent his Holy Spirit into that home and touched the heart of the little Phillis, having faith that great results would follow.

CHAPTER VIII.

THROUGH DARKNESS TO LIGHT.

ALTHOUGH out of danger for the time, Phillis did not seem to improve as they had hoped. She lay most of the time in a half-sleep, and appeared but partly conscious when aroused. Weeks went by ere she could remember the past and call to mind her father's promise in regard to her baptism.

Erna and Frau Ehlert besought him to gratify the child's longing; and while filled with feverish anxiety to keep his promise, he feared that his wife's consent could not be obtained, and in her terribly nervous condition he dreaded to take the responsibility of insisting upon it. So, unless there were danger in delay, he thought it advisable to let time solve the problem which was agitating him, and in his heart prayed for a miracle that would reconcile the diverse views of his wife and child.

Frau Fredrica was much changed by her days and nights of anxiety. The least excitement caused faintness, and Dr. Wagner warned Herr Stark against

allowing her to be agitated in any way. It was this that kept his lips sealed in regard to the wish of his little daughter.

The minds of all were kept anxious by the continued weakness of Phillis and the return of her fever each evening, and Fredrica's days were passed in alternate hope and despondency. All the physicians of note within reach had seen her daughter and could give no hope of recovery. But it was a comfort to the poor mother to try every means to save her darling; and although Herr Stark and Erna knew there was no hope of benefiting her, they did not discourage the mother from trying each new physician and remedy which came to her knowledge.

One sultry afternoon, Fredrica sat at the bedside holding her darling's hand in hers, and for the second time since the sailing party the words came to her pale lips: "I am not a child of God; I am not baptized; I am a poor little heathen."

Herr Stark was standing at the foot of the bed, gazing upon his fading flower and the fair mother bathed in tears; for Phillis was much feebler, and Fredrica knew it.

"Why do you not keep your promise to the child? Why do you not gratify her by having

her baptized?" said she sharply, looking toward her husband.

Could it be possible! Did he hear aright? When he for weeks had been trying to frame words that would influence Frau Fredrica to allow the baptism, was she proposing it of her own free will?

"Thank God for this great victory," said Frau Ehlert, softly, as she clasped her hands in gratitude.

Fredrica insisted that it should be done as soon as possible, for in her heart was the thought, "If there be a God, perhaps he has power over life and death, and may give me the life of my darling."

"Let me be baptized in the sea, dear papa, where you and I sat the evening that sister Erna came home," said Phillis, her eyes beaming with joy. "Saco Naso was baptized in the river which ran close by his hut; but you will carry me in your arms, dear papa, and mamma and sister Erna, and dear Aunt Ehlert, and Anna will stand on the shore and see me taken into the fold, a little lamb of God."

"It shall be as you say, my darling," replied the father. "The spot you select is the same where your papa was baptized, his loving parents standing by, many years ago."

Herr Stark lost no time in seeing Pastor Müller,

and it was decided that Phillis should be baptized the next day at noon, she being always stronger in the early part of the day. Near the appointed hour Pastor Müller entered the Stark home for the first time since Fredrica had become its mistress.

The fragile, childish form was arrayed in spotless white, her golden hair crowning her head like an aureola—her beauty almost appearing not of earth.

The father took her in his arms, and the little procession went down the pleasant street, soon reaching the strand, where he placed her in the care of the pastor; and Phillis was immersed in the calm, beautiful, sunlit sea.

It was a moment never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it. The father, deeply moved, recalled to mind his own baptism, and regrets for his after wandering from the fold; while Erna, near by, longed to be worthy to receive this blessed outward signification of a renewed, regenerated heart. She had strayed from her early teachings, had wandered in the wilderness of doubt and indifference, and it had not brought peace. Frau Ehlert and Anna wept tears of joy at this evidence of answer to their prayers, and their earnest petitions ascended for the salvation of every one under the homestead roof. Only Fredrica stood

apart,—a mocking smile upon her lips at the “absurdity of the whole affair,” as she in her heart considered it. Of the significance of the ordinance, she had no knowledge; had never given it a serious thought. And now her mind was occupied with the hope that the heart of Phillis was set at rest by the fulfillment of her long desired wish, and that she would recover, and the baptism in this way prove a benefit.

They hastened to the carriage which was waiting for them, and Fredrica being assisted took Phillis upon her lap, Herr Stark and Pastor Müller sitting opposite, and they were driven rapidly home.

The beautiful eyes of Phillis beamed with joy, the look of anxiety and longing having disappeared from her expressive face.

Tears filled the eyes of all, but they were tears of happiness; Fredrica looking forward to restored health for her darling.

Erna reached the house just as the pastor was leaving it.

“I have a request to make of you,” said she, in a trembling voice. “I too long to be a child of God, but am ignorant of all that tends to redemption, as it has only been during the past few weeks that my attention has been called to it. To-day the longing

has come to me to be a happy Christian, like my little sister."

"You cannot be happier than I, that your attention has been called to this great, this only vital subject. The Spirit of God has indeed entered this home."

It seemed that the fulfillment of her ardent wish had been such a joy to Phillis that for a time she appeared really better, and Fredrica said to herself, "There is a God, and he will spare my child to me."

After that day Pastor Müller visited the Stark family frequently, and there was always a warm welcome for him from Herr Stark, Erna, and Phillis; but Fredrica always left the room before his entrance.

"I do not like pastors," she said by way of excuse; "they make me melancholy, reminding me always of a funeral."

Fredrica, like most worldly persons, had a fear of death, and tried to avoid thinking of it; filling her life so far with pleasure, that no time could be allowed for reflection. Those who love the Saviour have not that slavish fear, being willing to follow where he leads, looking upon the grave as the gateway through which we pass to eternal life; as the resting place for the weary body, while the soul passes on to eternal brightness, peace and rest.

No greater contrast, therefore, in view of death, could be found than that between Phillis and her mother; Fredrica dreading it as an enemy that might at any time steal upon her unawares, and her little daughter looking upon it as a beautiful messenger to take her to be forever happy with her Lord.

Not long after the baptism of Phillis, Herr Stark had a conversation with Pastor Müller. "I much desire," said Herr, "to be restored to the place I held in the church before my marriage. Will you, my friend, and your assistants give me welcome?"

"Ask yourself, dear Herr Stark, if we dare refuse. It was not the ninety and nine which the loving shepherd grieved for; it was the one that had strayed from the fold."

"I felt quite sure that you would receive me," said Herr Stark; "but yet I have many disturbances; my wife—my Fredrica——"

"Why do you look upon the dark side, my friend? Remember the promise, 'All things work together for good to them that love God.'"

"Yes; yet I cannot help wishing that I could think of some way to reconcile my wife to it," replied he, with a sigh.

"Have you no confidence in the thought that the

way will be smoothed for you? Be comforted with the assurance that your Heavenly Father will not allow you to be tried beyond your strength. Think of the opposition of your wife in regard to the baptism of your child. When the time came, she was the one who proposed it. Be assured, my friend, that God will attend to that matter for you. Leave all in his hand."

"A grown pupil is generally troublesome, dear Herr Pastor. Have patience with me that I cannot cast all my care upon the Lord; and yet the acquiescence of my Fredrica in the case of the baptism, I cannot but look upon in the light of a miracle granted in answer to my prayers."

"And again our prayers will be answered. In that I have firm trust," replied the old pastor, as he arose to go.

The baptism of Phillis had indeed put new life into Erna and her father, for upon the Sunday following they went to church for the first time in many years; and Herr Stark was happier than he ever expected to be again in this world. They agreed with each other that their places there should never again be vacant, unless circumstances over which they had no control prevented it.

Christmas-tide was drawing near, and upon Erna devolved the preparations for it ; for Fredrica shuddered at the thought of any cheer, in view of the separation from her loved daughter. Phillis longed to see the brilliantly lighted tree, and Erna resolved to gratify her.

In the years when Fredrica had management of the Christmas festivities, they were brilliant indeed ; the significance of the festival being a dead letter to her, as her only object was to celebrate the time with more luxurious expenditure than any of her acquaintances could afford. So the most costly decorations were upon the tree, the presents were elegant, and the tables groaned with the richest viands that money could procure ; and the young wife of the wealthy Herr Ludwig Stark was gratified with the praises showered upon her.

As they had but few relatives, the elegant home was filled with guests, and music and dancing were the order of the day ; and her elegant entertainment became the theme upon every tongue.

Erna knew nothing of the manner in which her stepmother had celebrated the blessed Christmas-tide, and at the pension it was not celebrated in any way ; so she was guided entirely by Frau Ehlert in her

preparations for it. It was certainly very different from that of former years. The tree was placed in the room of Phillis, that from her bed she could view it without exertion. It was made brilliant with many wax tapers; the inexpensive presents were placed at its foot, and the delight of Phillis knew no bounds, when the children of the poor school marched around it, two by two, and sang a beautiful Christmas hymn. After this each one was presented with a useful gift from her hand, provided by Erna, at the suggestion of Frau Ehlert.

"Could heaven be more beautiful than this?" whispered Phillis to Erna, after the children had sung a joyful anthem around the brilliant tree.

"Much more beautiful, dear little heart," whispered Erna, as she kissed her tenderly. "The singers there will be white robed angels, with soft white wings, and their voices will be far sweeter than anything we can imagine."

Fredrica had heard the question and the reply, and a smile of derision crossed her lips. If her child was so happy in the delusion, she would not for worlds rob her of it; but that an intelligent, educated girl like Erna should believe such fables, seemed beyond comprehension. And yet, in poor Fredrica's heart was

a yearning for something better than the world had yet offered ; a blind reaching out for comfort in her coming bereavement, which she felt that no human being could give.

Erna had, at the suggestion of Frau Ehlert, given to Phillis as her gift a small cross ; and nothing could have pleased her so well.

“All my presents are beautiful, papa,” said she, one evening a few days after Christmas, “but the dearest of them all is the cross that sister Erna gave me, because it makes me think of little Naso, to whom I owe so much. I must do something for missions, papa ; please give me a dollar. If no missionary had been sent to the heathen, Aunt Ehlert would not have had the beautiful story of Naso, the heathen boy, to tell me, and I would not have been, as now, a child of God.”

Herr Stark took a gold piece from his pocket book and gave it into the little thin hand which rested upon the coverlet.

“Oh, papa, dear papa, you are so good,” said the child, joyfully. “I will give this to Pastor Müller when he comes ; he will know the best way to send it.”

Herr Stark knew better than did Phillis how much

he owed to missions, and his heart went out to those self-denying ones who had left home and kindred to go to preach to all nations, in obedience to the command of God.

“Phillis,” said he, tenderly, “I will set aside a portion of money every year for missions, and it shall not be a small sum.”

The beautiful eyes of the child grew dim with joyful tears, and she kissed her father’s hand in silent gratitude.

As the days passed on, the glimmering light of the little girl’s existence grew dimmer and dimmer; and even Fredrica lost hope, but could not look upon the child’s release from earth with the comforting faith which upheld the father and Erna.

The time came all too soon. The gentle spirit was beyond the stars.

A great comfort to them all was her peaceful, happy departure; no pain, no struggle, but like a play-weary child upon its mother’s breast, she fell asleep with the present of Erna clasped in her arms, her last words being “The cross, the dear cross!”

Poor Fredrica, who had stood faithfully by her darling, fainted and was borne by pitying hands from the room; and the same evening was in a nervous fever

which Dr. Wagner knew would surely follow the long and severe strain which she had endured.

Her illness was a severe trial to Herr Stark ; his heart being filled with anxiety not only for her earthly life, but for the immortal soul of his beautiful wife.

It was also a great trial to Erna, whose strength was almost exhausted by her vigils by the sick bed of her little sister ; but her prayers for strength were answered, and her stepmother's sick bed was as faithfully and tenderly watched as was that of Phillis.

Frau Ehlert was, as heretofore, the greatest of comforters ; and Erna, having her help and companionship, with that of her father, Pastor Müller and Anna, felt herself encompassed by blessings.

CHAPTER IX.

CLINGING TO THE CROSS.

HERR STARK followed the remains of his beautiful and beloved little Phillis to their last resting place, and although his grief was great, he could think of her only as a redeemed one, blessed of her Father, at home in heaven for evermore. He knew that the love and care of the Saviour was far better than any that this poor earth could offer, and was comforted in knowing that she was beyond all sickness and sorrow.

He could have remained at the vault in which she was laid for a long time, but the thought of his suffering wife at home caused him to return to her as quickly as possible.

In wild lamentation poor Fredrica bewailed the loss of her only child. Herr Stark and Erna could offer no comfort, for she did not believe in the God who had loaned little Phillis to her, and in his own good time had recalled her to himself. Could she have had faith in God, in his divine wisdom, love

and mercy, how easy would have been the task of comforting her; or, rather, how little would she have taxed their anxious hearts. But heaven was a sealed book to her; she could not look beyond the grave.

Days and weeks went by, and yet there was no light in her darkened soul. She was conscious of her surroundings, but for the most part lay silent, and suffered not the name of God to be mentioned in her hearing. She preferred to have Frau Ehlert with her, above any other person, excepting Herr Stark or Erna; and as Frau Ehlert had comforted the daughter, so now she strove to comfort the mother, though without immediate results upon her spiritual life.

Frau Ehlert was patient, and never lost faith that the poor mother would yet become reconciled to her loss as coming from a wise and loving Father. It came more natural for Frau Ehlert to serve others than herself, and her anxieties for her own family were laid in the hands of her Saviour. In return, she found peace and rest for her soul in doing the duty nearest to hand, that of trying to lead a poor wandering sinner home, following the example of her Redeemer.

She had plenty of assistance in the care of Frau Fredrica, yet the responsibility was upon her; for

Erna's hands and heart were full in taking care of her father, who was seriously ill. The sadness of the years which were gone had broken his health, and the sorrow and anxieties of the past few weeks had been too much for his feeble strength.

Erna was his faithful attendant. Leaning upon a strong arm, in those hours of darkness, as she accompanied her loved father to the edge of the valley of the shadow of death, she was his comforter in earthly things, as was his Saviour in those pertaining to eternal life.

Pastor Müller frequently visited him; and on the evening of his death, after he had bidden him farewell and left the house, Herr Stark called his daughter to his bedside.

"The hand of the Lord is always ready to assist," said he, in a feeble voice. "You, my dear Erna, have proof of his loving kindness. I leave you without anxiety, for you know to whom to go in time of trouble. But my poor wife, my Fredrica, all my anxiety is for her. You, my Erna, will, I trust, be to her all the help you can; and my earnest prayer is that my unhappy wife may fall at the foot of the cross with the cry of, 'My Lord and my God.'"

Erna could not speak. She gently sank upon her

knees at the side of the bed and her father laid his hand upon it in blessing. After a time the hand grew heavier, and she knew by its stillness that her father had left earth and had rejoined her mother and little Phillis in heaven.

The young girl arose and looked about her ; heart and mind stilled by her great sorrow. She was but nineteen years of age, and in a manner alone in the world. Father and mother gone, no near relatives in the world, all existence so changed to her within one short year. In these very rooms, now so silent, once reigned mirth and revelry ; and the young companions who had helped her make the hours pass with flying feet, were no longer there.

The news of the death of Herr Stark went rapidly through the city, and there was no lack of attention and sympathy from every side ; proving to the sorrowing daughter the estimation in which her father was held.

Herr Stark had made no effort to cultivate new friendships, but to his old and tried friends he was very dear. For the poor and needy he had ever a sympathizing heart and willing hand ; and their grief over their loss was sincere.

The sympathy of friends in this, the darkest hour

of her life, was very sweet to Erna ; but it was only Frau Ehlert and Pastor Müller that she wished to share her loneliness. Their society was an unspeakable comfort to her. At her earnest solicitation, Frau Ehlert made arrangements that would enable her to remain with Erna, and all things seemed to favor it. Frau Ehlert's eldest son had received a call to a church in a distant city, which he was about to decline on account of his mother, for whom he had promised to provide a home. Now that Erna so earnestly longed to have her society, she urged him to accept it. Her other sons were in good homes, and were rejoiced to know that she would be so well cared for in the elegant home of Fräulein Erna Stark.

Frau Fredrica was provided by will with an ample yearly income, and now that little Phillis was not there to share it, Erna was sole heir to Herr Stark's vast possessions. During his illness he had told her all it was necessary for her to know in regard to managing her estate ; and advised her in case of any perplexity to consult his old advccate and trusted friend of many years. The members of the firm of which her father had been senior partner were astonished at her knowledge of the business.

Her mind being occupied, she was not free to brood

over her loneliness as she would otherwise have done ; and in time she recovered the strength of body and serenity of mind which had been so severely tried during the long sickness in the house.

But had Erna forgotten Dr. Fortescue? Nearly a year had passed since he left, and she was looking for him daily, as a year was the limit which her father had earnestly advised her to require of him as a test. What would be the result of his visit? What answer could she give to the question which she was quite sure he would ask? Who could advise her? No one! She must throw all her care upon her God; to him alone tell all her perplexities and sorrows.

Erna was by nature reserved. It was difficult indeed for her to speak of her feelings; wholly impossible to impart this secret of her heart to any friend, no matter how dear. She had mentioned the subject to her father once, and received his opinion, and from that time the subject was never mentioned between them.

She loved Fortescue, and had a hope that he too had found joy in believing. If not, then she must give him up; a great trial to her loving heart, but strength would be given her to do the right, and, if need be, to efface the image of Fortescue from her heart.

In the meantime Fortescue was not without knowledge of the changes that had come to the Stark household ; although, true to her promise to her father, Erna had held no communication with him. She had seen a letter in Fredrica's hand in the well-known writing of Dr. Fortescue, but had asked no questions and knew not the place of his sojourn ; did not know but that he had forgotten her. Fredrica was much surprised at this apparent indifference, and considered it a great want of gratitude in Erna to the one who had, at the risk of his life, saved that of little Phillis. At length the day came that Dr. Fortescue was to return, and hope and despondency reigned alternately in the heart of the young girl. In that year, what changes might have come into the life of the young man ! It might be that his heart had turned to his Saviour ; he too might have become a child of God. The dear and loving Elder Brother had died for all, and to him all things were possible. Might not Fortescue, like herself, have wearied of his wanderings and returned to his Father's house ? Was it not in a fraction of time that a Saul was converted to a Paul ?

No, Dr. Fortescue had not forgotten her. She was doubly a prize, now that wealth was at her command,

and her beauty more pre-eminent than before. She had a look of serenity and repose which almost daunted him, and he attributed it to the religion which he had prophesied would render her rigid in manner, and severe in speech. Through Fredrica, he had been kept apprised of all these changes; had heard of every little incident which had transpired, and knew all as well as though he had never left the place.

Erna received him kindly and cordially as she might a dear friend who had returned from a year's sojourn; but betrayed no evidence of the conflict in her own heart, while she saw that he was deeply agitated.

"And is it thus we meet?" said he, extending his hand in greeting. "You had sorrow, and I was not here to comfort you; for my heart tells me that you love me, and longed for my presence."

Erna returned the pressure of his hand, but made no reply. Much must be understood before she gave the promise he asked.

Feeling herself unable to stand, she took a seat upon the sofa, while Fortescue leaned upon the chimney opposite to her and waited for her to speak.

But for Erna it seemed for a time impossible to frame a question. She could not collect her thoughts.

She felt that a conflict was to be waged between them, and prayed for strength.

“My Erna,” said Dr. Fortescue at length, “the year of absence has estranged you from me. I had hoped for a different reception from one who has promised to be my wife.”

Erna strove for composure; she wished to appear less agitated, and to be able to reason the matter calmly with him. “The whole matter rests with you,” said she, at length. “Have your opinions in regard to God and a hereafter undergone any change since I saw you?”

A cold sneer crossed his face for an instant, and was gone. But Erna had seen it, and recognized it as the same which had sent such a feeling of terror to her heart the day of the sailing party. There was no need for words; she had her answer. The look of sarcastic ridicule once seen could never be forgotten; and her mind was made up.

“Could my conscience allow me to follow the dictates of my heart, the answer might be different,” said she, “but it dare not be. We must part from each other; we cannot walk the same pathway in life.”

“You speak in riddles, Fräulein Erna; how am I to understand you? You are your own mistress; no

one can have a right to influence you. Have you ceased to care for me?"

It was impossible for Erna to answer for a moment. His words only served to remind her of her loss, and of her father's opposition to the handsome and distinguished looking young man whose outward appearance was, in his experienced judgment, so at variance with heart and mind.

"This is not the question that is to separate us," answered she, faintly; "if you could tell me, truthfully, that you are a believer, that you look to the Saviour for deliverance from your sins, then you have the place next to him in my heart."

He looked at her with perfect astonishment upon his features. It was the first time in his life that any one had spoken directly to him upon the subject. Were the ludicrous speeches in regard to Erna's religion which Fredrica had given in her letters then really true?

"Poor girl!" said he, softly. "I know you have had sorrow, but I did not suppose it would have such an effect upon you as to influence you to put faith in the foolish fable of the Nazarene, believed only by weak-minded women and children. I wish I had returned earlier, and by my companionship preserved

you from such errors. If there be a God, you must hate him instead of loving him, when he has brought so much trouble upon a house which a short time ago was so full of pleasure and happiness. Come, be my wife. With me you will forget all this nonsense."

Erna loved this man, but the time had come when she must decide between her God and him; and her heart grew faint with a sick longing for the separation to be over.

"It is impossible," said she at length, her lips pale from her emotion. "Our paths in life diverge; even companionship between us must cease."

"Is not *love* the bond which unites us," said Fortescue, "and does not true love endure forever? If your love for me is as sincere as mine for you, you would not give me up for that reason; knowing, as you do, that I should not interfere with your belief. You are welcome to believe all the fables you please; it will not trouble me in the least."

"But I could never be happy with one who denies his Saviour," said Erna.

"Then you do not love me, and any more words are useless," said Fortescue, the color receding from his face. "If you cared for me, the mummery of

preachers, and the imbecile jargon of so called Christians, would not have any effect upon you."

"You have said enough," said Erna, in a low voice. "Let this torment cease. Every word you speak widens the gulf between us. Let it not become so wide and deep that I dare not allow myself to think of you."

She arose, and drawing aside the portierre which separated the parlor from the library, she looked back for a moment upon the one whom she had so loved, and who seemed almost petrified by her words.

"Farewell," said she, faintly, "I cannot unite myself to an unbeliever. I cannot forsake my Saviour for any earthly love. That you may seek the way that leads to eternal peace will be my prayer always."

She felt her strength failing, and dropping the portierre she sank upon the sofa in the library, shutting Dr. Fortescue from view; not, however, shutting out his words, which tortured her gentle heart as perhaps nothing else could have done, yet never for a moment making her waver in her determination.

"Farewell, Erna," he cried, in tones of anger and despair. "In separating from you I separate from all good that your love has awakened in me. I had the will and the power to make you happy, and you

would have made of me a good man, if not one that was pious. In your society I was learning to love goodness for its own sake. You are pushing me out among the powers of darkness from which I was trying to escape ; and if there be a place of torment and I am consigned to it, you may consider yourself responsible.”

While the wretched man was speaking, he was moving toward the outer door, but paused, hoping that Erna would make her appearance. The portierre remained closed, and there came no response from within.

Dr. Fortescue remained a moment in thought. He wished to be quite sure that all was ended between them. His glance rested upon the luxurious appointments of the room ; he reflected upon the vast wealth of Herr Stärk, which was now Erna’s, and he realized what he had lost in losing her. Had he tried every inducement to retain her ? Was there no plea he could offer ? He must make one more trial. He had never yet been opposed in his wishes ; he had been flattered and courted by every one, and in society his highest wish was respected. He would see her again and plead his cause anew.

But Erna had not fought the battle single-handed

and with her own weapons. She had a mighty helper, who stretched his protecting hand over her. She was safe within the shadow of the Almighty.

She called to mind the words of Scripture: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"

Dr. Fortescue parted the portierre and glanced in. The soft texture of the carpet gave no token of his footfall. Erna knelt beneath the portrait of her father, and in her arms was the cross which she had taken from the lifeless arms of her little sister Phillis. In the feeling of her own weakness, she had reached out for earthly comfort while asking God to deliver her from temptation; and her prayer was granted.

Fortescue felt that she was lost to him. He left the room, resolved to flee from the city. But where? He had obtained a temporary position in a chemical laboratory in Hamburg, merely as a pretense of business until Erna should be his wife; but all this was past and gone, and he saw that nothing remained to him but to begin the world anew.

CHAPTER X.

PASTOR MULLER'S COUNSEL.

THUS the years passed away, and Erna knew nothing of Dr. Fortescue, and knew not the place of his sojourn. After the visit he had paid her, he departed as suddenly as he had come, and none in the city troubled themselves about him in any way. The place he had once filled in society was occupied by a worthier man, and in no way was he missed ; his very existence being in a manner forgotten, as was that of other summer guests who visited the Baths for a season and then gave place to others.

The harbor town had increased greatly, owing to the growing popularity of the Baths ; and for the crowds of people, who came from every quarter, accommodations had to be provided. Avenues of cottages had sprung up—mushroom like—along the beach, and a traveler upon the sea who had not seen it for several years scarcely would have recognized it.

But in the city itself there was but little change. The old, gray dwellings still kept their air of stately

elegance, and the wide, clean streets their wonted quietude, except during "the season," when they were gay with handsome equipages and elegant costumes.

There was one new building, however, that won much admiration for its beauty, it being considered a masterpiece of architecture. That building was the Stark Memorial Church, erected by Erna in memory of her father. Its tall, slender spire reminded her and others of him who, through great tribulation, had washed his robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Erna had seen much sorrow and much happiness in the beautiful home of which she was sole mistress, and was leading a useful and busy life. The severe fever from which Fredrica had suffered after the death of Phillis had left her weak in body and mind; she took no interest in anything, and had apparently no object in life.

The helplessness and dependency of her stepmother had filled Erna's heart and hands in the first years of her bereavement, and employment had been the best tonic for her. Through others, help had come to her, as well in sorrow as in joy, and she was comparatively happy in the steadfast path of duty.

Every plan had been taken to arouse Fredrica from

her state of apathy, but in vain. She loved only to sit in a darkened room and brood over her sorrows, undisturbed by contact with the outside world.

Frau Pastor Ehlert was not a member of the Stark household for a great while, owing to the circumstance that her eldest son accepted a call to become pastor of the church built by Erna, and his mother was to preside over the parsonage home.

But the families were near, and were very intimate and helpful toward each other. Erna appeared only to value her money for the good it did others. She had assumed the expense of a college education for the youngest son, who was to study for the ministry, and whose vacations were passed equally between the parsonage and the home of Fräulein Erna Stark.

In Frau Ehlert's place, as companion to Frau Fredrica, Erna had secured the services of Clara Müller, a niece of her good old pastor, and a cheerful, bright girl, whose spirits were not the least affected by the despondency of Fredrica, and whose influence was beneficial to the world-weary woman. Through her cheery persistence, the windows were gradually opened, to allow the sunshine and fresh air to enter; flowers were placed in the broad sills, and a cheery fire upon the broad hearth took the place of the

porcelain oven, which Fredrica had insisted upon retaining in her apartment during the winter. And all was done in such a way that Fredrica, before she was aware of it, was enjoying the change she could not prevent.

This assistance left Erna more time for outside work, and Pastor Ehlert and Pastor Müller gave her advice as to the best way to aid the poor and needy; Erna giving with a free hand when the object was pointed out.

In the world of society, where she had once been a brilliant light, her name was no more heard, except in good-natured ridicule as a *pietist*. But this did not disturb Erna in the least; all creatures in God's universe were dear to her, and for his sake she helped and comforted them. She established a "Home" and school for destitute children, with grounds about it, where they could romp and play, and where vegetables and fruit could be cultivated by the pupils for the use of the Home. She organized a society of trained nurses, whose work was to visit the sick and destitute, and aid them in every way, her money providing all the needed assistance, as well as a home for the nurses in their seasons of freedom from duty.

In this way the time passed on; and one bright afternoon, in late autumn, just ten years after Erna had returned from the pension, she was superintending the arrangement of the table in the library for the four o'clock coffee. She was now past twenty-eight; but in her matured beauty she was far more attractive than when she took part in the tableaux, as the Princess Leonore to the Tasso of Dr. Fortescue.

"I expect seven guests," said she, turning to one of the maids; "see that everything is upon the table before it is ready to be served, that there may be no confusion."

Old Anna and Heinrich had followed Herr Stark to the heavenly home, and it was a younger set of servants that now took their place in the old home.

"Now bring the cakes and other things, but not the coffee until the Herr Pastor Müller is here; and tell Conrad to be on hand to assist him from the carriage, and Lizette to be ready to help the ladies with their toilettes, should they need assistance."

That afternoon was the first time since her illness that Frau Fredrica could be prevailed upon to make her appearance in company. When the guests arrived, she came to the table with Clara Müller; and although she understood the conversation, she took no part in

it, and showed no disposition to be conversed with. So the guests respected her evident wishes.

Young Pastor Ehlert accompanied the aged Pastor Müller, glad always of any opportunity which would place him in the society of Erna, whom he, as well as Frau Ehlert, looked upon as the noblest among women, and whom he hoped to win as his wife.

Acting upon the advice of Dr. Wagner, Erna was about to take Frau Fredrica to Switzerland, to remain at least a year, hoping thus to benefit her health ; and the main motive of this little entertainment was to arrange for the prosperity of the Children's Home and sisterhood of nurses while she should be absent.

She appointed from among her guests a treasurer, in whose hands she placed a sum of money for the use of the Home and sisterhood ; appointed Frau Pastor Müller to provide the clothing for the little ones, and Major von Lenzen, a retired veteran, to care for the harvesting of the winter grain, fruit, and vegetables of the school land, and to see to the providing of the winter's fuel.

"My horses are at your service, dear friend, for any use you wish to make of them," concluded she, "and I will be glad to have them used during my absence."

"We hope to see you back in a year, at least," remarked Frau Ehlert.

"You will not be more pleased to see me than I shall be to return," said Erna. "Yet I long to visit Switzerland; I had some pleasant years there."

"I expect to go to Berlin to-morrow," remarked young Pastor Ehlert. "Could I be of any service to you while there? I shall be there when you arrive."

"Yes; you will please give my kindest greetings to your brother Eric, who is to meet us at the station, if possible."

"I am well acquainted with Berlin," continued the young pastor, "and will secure a pleasant stopping place for you, if you will give me permission."

"You are very kind, and I will gladly accept your offer. Mamma and I will remain for several days, and we have but little acquaintance with Berlin."

The pastor mentioned a quiet hotel, where he would secure comfortable rooms for them; and Major von Lenzen agreed with him that it was indeed a home in everything that tended to the comfort of its guests. The company rose from the table, and shortly after bade good-bye to their hostess and left, with the exception of Pastor Müller, whom Erna had requested to remain.

The coffee table had been removed from the library, and Frau Fredrica had returned to her room, accompanied by Clara Müller.

Erna had some further arrangements to make, upon which she wished to ask the old pastor's advice, and they drew chairs to the hearth, upon which blazed a bright fire. Very comfortable and cheerful was the beautiful apartment at that hour, the ruddy beams casting a rosy glow upon the rich frames of the pictures and the marble busts and statuettes about the room. It was the same handsome apartment into which Dr. Fortescue had glanced nine years before, and was not changed in any particular since that time. A small table stood under the portrait of Herr Stark, and a Bible lay upon it which had belonged to Phillis. This room had been the favorite one of Herr Stark, and Erna used it for a sitting room, receiving her guests there.

"This is such a cool day that a fire is really agreeable," said she, as Pastor Müller took the seat she placed for him.

"I always liked a bright, open fire," replied the old man, contentedly. "I think aged people are like children in that respect."

"I have asked you to remain, dear fatherly friend,"

said she. "I wish to tell you of something that gives me anxiety."

"You allude to the health of your Frau mother," replied he. "Certainly she grows feebler; I scarcely think she will be with you very long."

"I feel much more reconciled to her leaving me now than I would have felt a few years ago. In early life she would not listen to a word relating to a hereafter; but Frau Ehlert talked much to her, and mamma at length began to listen to the simple stories which had so comforted little Phillis. She looks forward to a meeting with Phillis, with the glad longing of a child; and I cannot but feel that she will be accepted of the Father. But, dear Herr Pastor, dare we hope that she who rejected him in her strength of matured intellect will be accepted of him now that she has turned to him in her childish weakness?"

"Our Saviour has made no conditions. 'Him that cometh to me I will in *nowise* cast out.'"

Tears of joy rushed to Erna's eyes, and she clasped the hand of Pastor Müller in both hers.

"You have always words of comfort, dear Herr Pastor," said she. "Poor mamma has surely come to him, for she trusts him with the same childish faith

that characterized her child. Since Clara came, she has asked for the stories of Christ and his love to be read to her from the Bible, and they seem to comfort her."

"The power of the gospel is wonderful," replied the old pastor. "I think you have every cause to hope for your mother."

Erna arose and placed several sticks upon the smouldering fire, and resumed her seat.

"I wish I could be assured of the eternal happiness of some others of my loved ones,—one in particular, who has been very dear to me."

A world of sorrow, and it seemed regret, came into her tone, and the old pastor glanced inquiringly upon her. Her eyes were cast down, but her lips trembled, as though tears were nigh.

He had known her from a child, and thought he knew every circumstance of her life, yet here was a problem which he could not solve. Years before, he had heard rumors of an attachment between the beautiful daughter of Herr Ludwig Stark and the young foreign doctor, but supposed there was no truth in the rumor.

There was silence between them for some time, each being occupied with thoughts which the conversation

suggested. The pastor had something upon his mind which he wished to mention to Erna, yet felt a delicacy in doing so.

"I have often wished to ask you, Fräulein Erna, if the resolution you made several years ago is yet in your mind?"

"You allude to my wish to become a member of the band of deaconesses in our denomination. Yes; should my mother be taken from me, I should have no family ties to bind me here, and would make my home among them."

"You may think it strange, my dear young friend, that I, your pastor, should discountenance such a step, but I do, and cannot refrain from giving you my candid opinion in regard to it. The work which you have now on hand has, by God's blessing, prospered, and I do not think it would be wise to abandon it when there are so few that are capable of managing it, and so many capable of filling the position of deaconess."

"But, my dear pastor, in my opinion, no human being is indispensable; if it be the work of God, my coming or going could make no difference. My money would remain here to be devoted to the cause."

"Your money, Erna, is a help not to be despised,

and it will be used to better advantage in the work of the Lord where the motive power is love and interest. You should not leave here. The Lord will raise up others to fill the place of deaconess; he can also lay obstacles in your path, as he has done for years in the illness of your mother, and her subsequent weakness of mind and dependence upon you."

"But he bids us labor in his vineyard."

"His calls for laborers in his vineyard are not to those whose hands are already full, but to those who are standing idle. Your work is already in hand; you would not be doing right to leave it."

The advice of her honored pastor came to Erna like a revelation. She had not considered the matter at all in that light, and she resolved to give it her earnest consideration. In the meantime she had another subject upon her mind, which she wished to impart to him, and, if possible, gain aid and comfort from his opinion.

"There is another position which I am quite sure no one could fill better than yourself," continued the old pastor; "you are needed as a helpmeet to a young pastor, Fräulein Erna. Will you not consider it favorably? Hermann Ehlert wishes to make you his wife."

"Yes, I know it; but it cannot be," replied she, sadly.

"No one can do otherwise than appreciate the noble qualities of that young man," continued the pastor; "he is doing a noble work in this community, but he labors single-handed."

"He will have no difficulty in finding a helpmeet more suitable than I. You forget that I am nearly thirty years of age, and my care and anxiety make me feel years older. Hermann Ehlert appears too youthful for me; he must seek a younger woman, whose mind is not set upon being a deaconess," continued she, with a smile.

"But there are two sides to every question, Erna. I really think that duty points you to become mistress of the parsonage. You are constituted to be the centre of a happy home circle; and as an old friend of your father, as well as of yourself, I long to see you settled in life. Have I taken too much upon myself to thus speak so plainly to you?"

"How can you ask?" questioned Erna, looking upon him with the love and confidence she would have shown her father. "Have I not known you all my life and always found you a friend?"

"Your friend now and always," was the reply.

"Dear Herr Pastor," said she, in a voice trembling with emotion, "I wish to tell you of something which has troubled me for several years ; and in order to do so, I must go back to my first coming home from the pension in Switzerland."

"I am ready to listen to all you have to say, my child," replied the old pastor, somewhat wonderingly.

Erna commenced her story from the first evening of her entrance into society and meeting with Dr. Fortescue, and spoke of their attachment to each other, of her father's opposition, of his absence for a year, and his return to claim her as his wife.

"I can never forget his angry and despairing words," said she, in conclusion. "For nine years they have been a bitter remembrance to me. I fear, if he has sunk so deep in sin that it will be impossible to save him, that the guilt will, as he said, rest upon me. I might have saved him by my love."

"Suppose you erred there, Erna. God saw your heart, and knew you did what you considered right."

"That is my comfort for myself," replied the weeping girl, "but it does not help Dr. Fortescue ; for in Corinthians we are told : 'If a woman hath a husband that believeth not, and he be pleased to dwell with her, let her leave him not: For the unbe-

believing husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband' I had looked upon Dr. Fortescue as my future husband; I loved him; it was a hard struggle to give him up, yet I thought at that time that I must do so for my belief's sake. But his parting words make me fear that I have erred in not trying to win a soul for heaven."

"Dear Erna," replied the pastor, serenely, "in this case you have wholly set aside the calm judgment that has always characterized you. You were not the young man's wife. You were not even promised to him, for that depended upon your father's sanction, which was not given. Your father did not wish you to become the wife of Dr. Fortescue, and you may be assured he had other reasons besides the main one of unbelief. He evidently had no good opinion of him as a man, and judged him to be of a nature that could not be influenced by your goodness. He wished you to remain free, and that Dr. Fortescue should leave here for a time, well knowing that you would see matters in their true light when away from his influence. You unjustly accuse yourself of not trying to help him. Would your giving up your faith for his sake have been of advantage to him? Would he not

have esteemed it lightly had you married him, knowing him to be a scoffer of sacred things? I ask you, Erna, can you, dare you, think otherwise than that you did right?"

"But I might, through my godly life, have won him to Christ."

"Only with God is that possible."

"I know that well, yet he often uses us as instruments in the furtherance of his work, and I might, by my love and patience, have won the poor, erring man to peace and happiness."

"You, Erna,—you could have done all this?"

"No, not I, but the Lord through me," was the subdued answer.

"Is the arm of the Lord shortened? Does he need our poor help? Could he not do all this without the help of Erna Stark?"

The words of the old pastor were convincing; she raised her head and looked at him, with tears of joy in her eyes.

"And let me ask you," continued he, "are your hands tied because he is far from you? Are not our prayers carried upon wings of love to his throne? It has always been a comfort to me to believe that a child of many prayers cannot be lost."

Erna made no reply ; her tears fell softly from her downcast eyes.

He continued : “ You have every evidence that in obeying your earthly father, you have won the favor of God. He has richly blessed you, and rewarded your work a hundredfold. Think of the love bestowed upon you by the poor and afflicted whom you have helped ! Many, very many, bless you for the good you have done.”

“ I am indeed blessed in being allowed to work in his vineyard, and will remain here and do all that my hands find to do.”

“ Amen,” responded Pastor Müller, heartily, as he arose to go. “ But to Hermann, my poor young friend, have I then no encouraging word to take ? ”

“ He will easily find a helpmeet more suitable. I know one who is in every way worthy, and who would be highly esteemed in his charge as the wife of their pastor.”

“ Oh, Erna, your heart is truly untouched, if you can thus plan for another. Would you object to telling me the name of the young lady ? ”

“ Not at all,” smiled Erna ; “ it is Fräulein Clara Müller. She would be in every way suitable for a minister’s wife as she is for a minister’s niece.”

“That will be as God wills,” replied her old friend, looking somewhat bewildered over the new thought suggested to him, as he bade her good-bye.

The long talk with Pastor Müller had done Erna much good; she felt that a great burden had been rolled from her heart, and she could look into the future with hope and serenity.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

ERNA, her mother, Clara Müller, a maidservant, and a manservant reached Berlin safely. They were met at the railway station by the Ehlert brothers, who conducted them to the hotel, and Erna was charmed with the comfortable accommodations provided for them.

Erna was pleased also to see that Eric had grown so tall and so handsome, and he was delighted to see his benefactress, whom he called "Aunt Erna," at her earnest desire. She was accustomed to that name, the children of the "Home" and school being instructed to give her this appellation; and in time the children of her friends and acquaintances did the same, at which she was much pleased.

She felt some natural embarrassment in meeting the young pastor, but his easy and natural manner convinced her that good Pastor Müller had not imparted to him the conversation which concerned him, and she soon regained her equanimity. She

truly enjoyed the visit to Berlin, having for years led such a secluded and monotonous life, on account of the illness of her mother.

At length the morning came when they were to leave Berlin to continue their journey, and the Ehlerts had arranged to meet her at the railway station and see that all was arranged for her comfort during the journey.

Fredrica, being unaccustomed to rise early, refused to leave her bed, was restless, and dissatisfied at being disturbed, and for a time was not willing to be dressed. At length, after many difficulties and hindrances, they were on their way. Although Erna was quite sure that they would not reach the station in time, yet the driver of the drosky being liberally paid for driving faster than usual, to her great relief they found the train still there, and the Ehlert brothers watching for them.

In haste they were helped from the drosky and into the first-class carriage of the train, then the brothers hastened to the platform to bid her good-bye at the window. When they reached it, they found Fräulein Erna gazing with pale face and earnest eyes upon a man sitting upon a bench outside the depot, and apparently quite unconscious of her surroundings.

He was, or had been, a fine-looking man, and was well clothed ; but his features were pale and very much emaciated, while his sunken eyes showed that he was very ill.

“Aunt Erna, what is the matter?” inquired Eric, astonished at the look of almost terror on the face of Fräulein Stark.

“Are you ill?” inquired the young pastor, anxiously.

She could not speak,—could scarcely breathe. And at that moment one of the officials came and closed the door of the car, the train being about to start.

“I know him,” gasped she, pointing to the stranger. “He is an old friend,—is dear to me ; I yet have a warm interest in him ; take this purse and do the best you can for him.” The train started out, and the young men looked after it in dumb bewilderment.

“Do you understand this?” at length said the young pastor.

“It is a mystery to me ; as to you,” was the reply of Eric.

“This miserable-looking wreck and the beautiful Fräulein Erna Stark ! There certainly is some error ; she has made a mistake in the man, and thinks it is some one she has known.”

"She is very benevolent, and takes great care of the poor and sick," responded the younger brother. "No doubt this is some one who has been in her hospital."

"No; her words and manner do not lead to that conclusion. Did you see how pale she was, and how her hand trembled when she handed me this purse? I thought she would faint; there is some mystery about this." Both turned to the bench, where sat the wretched-looking stranger, his head resting upon his hand. Before they reached him, one of the officials came from within and shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"See here, old fellow, two hours are long enough for you to sit here waiting for a ticket to Frankfort to drop from the clouds. You had better move along. He says he had a ticket and lost it," continued he, turning to the young men; "but we hear that story too often to put much faith in it."

The stranger opened his dark, sad eyes and looked about him, but gave no other sign of having heard the command.

"Who is he?" inquired the young pastor.

"I have not the least idea," was the reply. "All I know of him is that he says he had a ticket,

first class, and missed it while waiting for the train."

"Poor creature!" remarked Eric, compassionately.

"I suppose he is drunk," remarked the official.

"No, I think not," responded the pastor; "but he looks sick, very sick. I think it well that he lost his ticket; he might have died on the way."

"I would rather he would be drunk than sick," responded the official, in a vexed tone, "for he could move along when he got sober, whereas, if he is sick, we will have the bother of getting him to a hospital."

"We will take charge of him," responded Hermann, giving the man a fee to have a carriage sent.

During this colloquy, the train containing Erna was speeding along, and she was gazing from the window, her heart filled with sorrow and longing, as every moment bore her farther from Berlin.

Only the eyes of love could have rendered possible the recognition of this wretched-looking creature, once the aristocratic and elegant-looking Dr. Fortescue, who only ten years before won the admiration of all in her native city. Her heart ached for the poor outcast, and her tender conscience arraigned her as being responsible.

For the first time during the long sickness of her

stepmother, she felt the care of her a burden and restraint, and gladly, for a time, would have laid it down to go to the assistance of Fortescue, had not duty in its strictest sense been her guiding star.

She gave to the objects which flew past her no thought, her gaze from the car window being far in the past. She was again a happy girl in her father's house; all was gayety and pleasure; the poor, faded flower on the seat beside her was then in its wonderful beauty; and Dr. Fortescue was there in all the pride of his manly prime. Erna could have wept at these changes; instead, she lifted up her heart in prayer that God would change his heart and bring him safely into the fold. Was he seeking his Father's face? Perhaps even now he was a child of God, weary of the world, and longing for rest.

Erna's dark eyes were dim with tears as these thoughts surged through her mind, now sad, now hopeful. For ten long years she had prayed to see him happy in believing; yet, perhaps, his heart remained unchanged. She could not help him even by a word, being chained to this poor nervous wreck, wherein the torch of life feebly glimmered, but whom she had promised her father to care for to the best of her ability.

These thoughts occupied her mind for the most part during the long journey through the northern, middle, and southern part of Germany, until they reached Montreaux. She said nothing of them to her fellow-travelers, but grew sadder and paler each day.

“I am glad we have reached a stopping place, Fräulein Erna,” remarked Clara Müller; “I believe if the journey had continued much longer you would have been ill.”

Erna was also glad to have a settled place, and lost no time in securing a cottage near the shore of the lake, in which Fredrica could be quiet and secluded, while she herself strove to be contented and patient, and hoped to hear news from Eric Ehlert.

At length a letter came, but gave very little comfort. Eric wrote that Hermann and himself had taken the sick stranger to a hospital, where he was receiving every attention, but was very ill, and, at time of writing, unconscious. From papers found upon him, it was ascertained that his name was Dr. Fortescue Stark, that he was afflicted with lung trouble, and there was no hope of his recovery.

Erna's first impulse was to write to Pastor Müller and ask him to go to Berlin and see after the spiritual welfare of poor Fortescue when he should become

conscious; but she scarcely deemed it just to request one of his age to make such a journey, and so reflected upon some other plan. She comforted herself with the words with which he had once comforted her,—that prayers could be offered for him as effectively there as in Berlin; and, believing this, her heart grew serene and peaceful.

A high mountain formed a background to the cottage; a large garden lay in front filled with lovely flowers, filling the air with fragrance; and the lake in calm beauty was within sight. It was a beautiful and romantic spot; yet Fredrica gained but little strength in the pure mountain air. As she was too weak to walk, the physician recommended a rolling chair, and Erna went to Montreaux to order it.

The little visit had refreshed Erna, and when she reached the road which led to the cottage, she halted to take a view of the lovely scenery,—the snow-capped mountains, the beautiful lake, the foliage glowing with the beams of the setting sun.

She passed on, and had reached the gate which led to the garden, when beside it she saw a little girl, about eight years of age, with beautiful large dark eyes, and a wealth of black hair, simply braided in two long strands. In her arms was a snow-white

lamb, while the mother sheep stood by, patiently gazing at her offspring. The child was neatly, but plainly clothed, and had placed a wreath of wild flowers upon her head. The lamb and its mother were gayly decked with the same beautiful ornaments, the scarlet of their petals forming a beautiful contrast to the snow-white fleece.

It was a subject worthy of an artist, and Erna longed to take a sketch, as a remembrance of that lovely evening. She had viewed the child from a distance, and then advanced and spoke to her. The little one did not remove from her place, but glanced upward, without the least embarrassment, into the face of the strange lady.

Erna saw at a glance that she did not in the least resemble other children in the rural neighborhood, and her heart thrilled at the expression in the soft, beautiful eyes.

"How foolish I am," thought she, "that I can never see a pair of large dark eyes without thinking of him who so occupies my mind. Here, hundreds of miles from the spot where he lies in loneliness and sickness, has my heart thrilled at the glance of a pair of eyes."

She stepped forward, and, clasping the hand of the



Erna Stark.

child, asked her in German who she was. The little one smiled and shook her head; she did not understand.

Erna then addressed her in French and found she had guessed the child's nationality rightly.

"My name is Leila, my lamb's name is Nini, and its mother's name is Mimi."

"Where do you live, my little one?"

"There in the valley; the path running along the brook leads to our cottage, where I live with my grandmother."

"Did you make these beautiful wreaths?" inquired Erna, for the sake of continuing the conversation and considering the beautiful eyes.

"Yes, lady, I made them. I make fresh ones every day; grandma says it is the only thing I can do. I cannot read and write, like the other children in the neighborhood; but it is not my fault, lady; it is really not."

"Why do you not go to school? You are old enough."

"Grandma cannot send me to school; she has no money."

"Would you be glad to learn, Leila?"

"Indeed I would; but I cannot go to school."

"I will teach you, and it shall not cost you anything."

"No money? no money?" repeated the child, incredulously. "I will bring you a wreath of fresh flowers every day, lady."

"I shall consider myself well paid, and it is good in you to think of it. I will go and see your grandmother to-morrow, and we will see what can be done."

"I am to learn to read and write," cried Leila, joyously, as she sprang up and clasped the sheep about the neck. "Oh, Mimi and Nini, are you not glad?"

She hastened home to tell her grandma the good news, the sheep following with short, quick springs, and Erna's gaze following them.

"The resemblance is wonderful," thought she, dreamily, as they disappeared from sight. And opening the gate, she too disappeared inside the cottage.

The next morning, Erna visited the cottage of the grandmother, who was pleased that Leila had the opportunity of learning, and it was agreed that she should come for two hours every morning.

It was a difficult task at first for Leila to apply herself to study, but she was bright and intelligent

and really anxious to learn. Besides, Erna was a charming teacher, and the lessons were always full of interest, for Erna loved all children, and this one she learned to love, as time passed on, above all others.

No mountain was too steep for Leila to ascend in search of rare flowers for Erna, and each morning lovely bouquets of edelweis, Alpen roses, and other sweet flowers, testified the gratitude of the child. She never came without a bouquet of some kind.

It soon became the delight of Erna to watch for the sweet, intelligent child, whose society was so cheering as to relieve the impatience incident to the long waiting for news from Berlin.

When the lessons were over, and Fredrica did not need the society of Erna, they took delightful walks in the shady valleys and by the lake, and Erna learned to love mountain climbing for the pleasure of accompanying Leila.

In the meantime she had received a letter from Eric, saying that, after consciousness returned to Dr. Fortescue, he seemed anxious to converse upon religious subjects; and she was again upon the point of writing to Pastor Müller to visit him, when, to her surprise and joy, she received one from him, saying that he was already there.

Only from this old and valued friend did she hope to receive the information which she craved above all other, for only he knew the early history of the sick man, and could minister to his needs as could none else.

Through Hermann Ehlert, he had heard of the accidental meeting of Erna with Dr. Fortescue, and had felt it to be his duty to tell the young pastor the whole affair of the attachment between them years before, and of his conversation with Erna before her departure for Switzerland.

The sympathy of Hermann Ehlert was much increased for Erna when he heard of the burden of anxiety she had borne. He saw that she had nothing but friendship to bestow upon him, but advised, or at least seconded, Pastor Müller's journey to Berlin, and did all he could to assist him in making preparations for his departure.

The letter from her fatherly friend brought the good news that Dr. Fortescue was a changed man, had given his heart to God, and was eager to converse on things which pertain to eternal life.

Erna's heart thrilled with gratitude to God for this wonderful deliverance, it being another proof that he hears and answers prayer. The weak condition of

the sick man prevented any more conversation than was absolutely necessary; but Pastor Müller informed her that Fortescue wished to use what strength he could summon to write or dictate a confession to her. He had made his peace with God, and now only longed for her forgiveness.

“So, as far as his earthly life is concerned, dear Fräulein Erna,” wrote the old pastor, “I can give you but little hope; yet with me you will, I know, praise and bless the dear Lord who has led this darkened soul into marvelous light. I must not tell you the story, but let him tell you of his coming home to his Father’s house.”

And Erna kissed little Leila, and wept happy tears over the letter.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONFESSION.

“**Y**OU must have left Berlin in the first train after receiving my telegram,” said Erna one evening, a few days after receiving his letter, as she grasped the hand of Pastor Müller at the door of her cottage.

“I did. I was expecting it, having heard through Eric that Frau Frederica was growing daily weaker. I came as soon as possible, after hearing that she was no more.”

“Was ever any one so blest as I in having such a friend as yourself? I fear I can never be sufficiently grateful to my Master for bestowing the great gift of faithful friends and helpers,” said Erna, tearfully.

Pastor Müller had taken the long journey to Montreaux to help arrange for the burial of Frau Fredrica, and to accompany Fräulein Erna and his niece Clara back to Berlin, and from thence to their home.

In that favored climate the air was mild and

invigorating, and Erna was sitting in the veranda when he came, looking at the ever new effect of light and shadow upon the mountains, though her thoughts were far away.

Pastor Müller took the large arm chair she eagerly offered, and sank into it with a sigh of content. The outlook upon the beautiful lake, the white cottages at the foot of the mountain, every distinguishing landmark in the beautiful scenery, was a delight to him, and he could not express his appreciation of the serene grandeur of the place.

Since coming to Switzerland. Frau Fredrica had seemed more willing to leave the seclusion of her room and enjoy the mild, strengthening air; yet her health did not improve, and, calm and serene, she was only waiting to be called home. The summons came unexpectedly, for she had seemed much better on the day of her departure; and although her death was looked upon as something that could not be averted, yet Erna was bewildered by the suddenness of it. Pastor Müller agreed entirely with her that Fredrica should have a grave in Switzerland, one reason being that she had been known in the harbor town as a professed unbeliever. Although Erna had every hope that her once beautiful stepmother had

died a Christian, yet she felt that there was no need to have the question of her resting in the Stark vault discussed when it could be avoided.

Erna had performed her duty faithfully to her poor, feeble-minded stepmother, and had done it ungrudgingly; soon, all she could do for her would be done, and she would be free to go whither she would. Every obstacle which prevented her from visiting the friend of her early youth was now removed; above and beyond all, they were children of one Father,—one in faith, in love, and in hope.

All arrangements for the burial of Fredrica were made while Erna sat with Pastor Müller and Clara that evening upon the veranda, and then she inquired eagerly for Dr. Fortescue.

“All is well with him,” replied the aged pastor; “but I must return as quickly as I can to Berlin, for he counts the hours until he sees me. He longs to converse with me upon things which, during life, he has so neglected; and as much as this charming place tempts me, I must give him all the companionship I can.”

It was a blessed moment to Erna when she heard the glad tidings of Dr. Fortescue’s conversion, and she looked back with tears of happiness to the time

when little Phillis had been touched with the power of the Spirit, and, through her, four others.

“Many years have passed since you met,” continued Pastor Müller, “and there will be some things that will be painful for you to hear and for him to reveal. You will have much to forgive in him, much to overlook.”

“Our Heavenly Father has also much to forgive,” replied Erna. “I must not act the part of the man who owed his king ten thousand talents, and when the debt was forgiven him, went out and had a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred pence thrown into prison. My indebtedness to my Heavenly Father must be far greater than his who has had the temptations of the world to combat from his childhood.”

The pastor made no reply; and at that moment a little girl came up the path and quietly ascended the steps of the veranda. It was Leila, and in her hands she held some lovely white flowers.

“Here, lady,” said she, gently, “I bring you flowers for the dead.”

“Who is the little girl?” questioned the pastor in surprise, as he gazed intently at the child.

“Her name is Leila Arnaud, and she lives with

her grandmother in a cottage in the valley," replied Erna, while she wondered to herself if the pastor also saw the wonderful resemblance to one whom they both knew ; but for some feeling, for which she could not account, she said nothing.

Leila had leaned confidently against the shoulder of Erna, and was looking at the strange visitor, while Erna smoothed the glossy hair reflectively and thought of the coming separation.

Occupied with these thoughts, she did not notice that the pastor was steadily observing the child. At length, apparently feeling that it might attract Erna's attention, he requested her to tell him something of Frau Fredrica's last hours.

"We always assisted her to come out into the veranda of evenings," replied Erna, "and she seemed to enjoy the beautiful scenery. Evening before last she came out as usual, and Clara and I had walked into the garden and culled some fragrant flowers for mamma. When I offered them to her, she did not respond, and we thought she was asleep ; but when we came nearer, we found she would no more wake in this world."

Both were silent, and their gaze was turned to the distant mountains.

“How beautiful!—how very beautiful it is here!” remarked the old pastor.

“It is,” replied Erna; “yet I often feel oppressed by the grandeur and nearness of the mountains, and long, inexpressibly, for the stirring breezes from the sea, which I have been accustomed to in my home.”

“But you lived several of the best years of your life in Switzerland,” remarked her friend.

“Yes; but I was always busy. I had an object in life, and was looking forward always to going home. This time I have been only waiting. But Clara has summoned us to tea; we will leave the veranda in good time, for the evening air is quite cool.”

They arose and entered the cottage, where Clara and the maid had prepared a comfortable repast, much enjoyed by the traveler; and after an hour or two of conversation, evening prayers were offered, and all retired early, the long journey making it necessary for Pastor Müller, while the others were also in need of rest after their long service of watching.

The next evening found them all again in the veranda. The world-weary Fredrica was reposing in the bosom of kind mother earth, and they had every hope that her spirit had rejoined her loved ones on the brighter shore.

Erna would have left for Berlin the next morning, but Pastor Müller had business in Geneva, and asked her to remain a day longer that he might attend to it.

She had hoped that he would tell her more of Fortescue, but he had been singularly reticent since the evening of his arrival, and she disliked to suggest the subject when she felt that he was avoiding it.

The next morning, before setting out for Geneva, he handed her a letter, which she recognized immediately as being in the handwriting of Fortescue.

“The Ehlert brothers, like myself,” remarked the pastor, “are astonished at the wonderful dealings of God with his creatures, and praise him that poor Fortescue has at length thrown himself at the foot of the cross. He longs to hear of Christ’s work upon earth, and rejoices over every addition to his strength that enables him to listen. He knows that his recovery is impossible, but is willing to go at his Master’s bidding.”

In the unsteady hand of weakness the letter had been penned, and Pastor Müller informed her that it had been written at many different times, and was intrusted to him, to be placed in Erna’s own hand.

Erna took the letter, but could not for a moment speak.

“In it you will see how, through many dark and devious ways, the poor wanderer has at length reached the light.”

Erna thanked the pastor for his words of comfort, and as he bade her good-morning, she hastened to her room, and opened her letter, a portion of which is here given :

MY DEAR ERNA : Let me call you by that loved name, as I did for the short time that I was permitted to consider you as mine. I was unworthy of you ; but now, as I stand at the portal of the grave, I pray you to forgive me, and let me see you again. God has forgiven my sins, and you, my Erna, will, I know, forgive me. Your pitying care has provided me with comforts in these my last hours, and my turning to the Saviour is, I fully believe, in answer to the prayers you have offered for me. Like the thief on the cross, I have come at the eleventh hour ; but sufficient is it that I have come. When I left your presence, ten years ago, it was not without a stricken conscience, for your words not only left an impression upon me, but I carried away with me the thought of you as I saw you kneeling beneath your father's portrait, and the vision has never left me. It filled me with anger and chagrin that I could not forget it. I did all I could to fulfill to the utmost the threat I made. I had the will to plunge into any excess of evil, which would be my revenge for your refusal to be my wife ; yet I could not doubt you loved me, for I saw what it cost you to give me up.

Of my life since I came here, my Erna, you know : you

finished the work of benevolence commenced by another, and through your kindness I have a comfortable home in which to pass my few remaining hours. I long now to hear from your lips that you have forgiven me. It is my great hope that you will be my wife. Be mine, as we are both the Lord's. It is the prayer of the dying

FORTESCUE.

When Erna finished the letter, she knelt down and gave thanks to God for his great mercy and goodness. He had answered her prayers. Fortescue was a Christian; for this she gave thanks and praise, and looked forward to the morrow when she would see him.

Pastor Müller appeared in the evening, and Erna with Clara was sitting upon the veranda, anxiously expecting him. He led little Leila by the hand, and Erna welcomed them heartily, drawing the child to her and kissing her white forehead. She looked into the dark eyes of the girl, and her own grew moist with sadness at the thought that this was the last evening that the dear little form would be near her.

At that moment she happened to look up at Pastor Müller, and noticed a peculiar look upon his face.

"Heavenly Father," cried she, pale with emotion, "this may be Fortescue's daughter!"

"Has it really never come to you until now, Fräulein Erna?" questioned her old friend.

"Never. I noticed the resemblance when I first saw her, but as I became acquainted with her, I ceased to notice it; and not knowing until I read the letter that he had a daughter, the thought never occurred to me."

The old pastor, knowing the story, had recognized the child the first time he saw her, by her wonderful resemblance to Dr. Fortescue Stark, and had gone to Geneva for the purpose of making inquiry. He had searched the church registry and found the name of Leila Arnaud Stark, daughter of Dr. Fortescue and Hortense Moran Stark, his wife; and had then visited the grandmother, and gained her consent that her great-grandchild should accompany them to Berlin, in obedience to the father's earnest desire.

"I will beg him to give her to me," said Erna, with tears of joy in her eyes. "Oh, I hope I may get the grandmother's consent to keep her."

"I do not think you have anything to fear from her. She is very old, and the care of the little girl is probably a severe tax upon her, no matter how much she loves her."

"I shall provide for the grandmother also," replied Erna. "Her last days shall be made comfortable, if money can make them so."

The next morning, before leaving for Berlin, they visited the cottage of the grandmother, and all arrangements were made for taking Leila with them. Then the little household set out upon the journey, and to the great joy of Fortescue, his little daughter was brought to him by Erna. His happiness was complete when Pastor Müller spoke the words which united him to her whom he had once lost; and she promised to be a mother to his child, both to remain with him until he was called home.

Pastor Mülller, knowing that it would not be long, remained also, and was the comfort to them, which he ever was to those in need.

One morning, but a few days after, Frau Erna Stark, clad in deep mourning for her loved husband, returned a widow to her ancestral home, feeling that years had passed over her since she had left it, so much had occurred of happiness and sorrow.

THE END.

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